

ANGELA'S BUSINESS

HENRY SYDNOR HARRISON

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By Henry Sydnor Harrison

ANGELA'S BUSINESS. Illustrated.

V. V.'S EYES. Illustrated.

QUEED. Illustrated.

HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY

BOSTON AND NEW YORK

ANGELA'S BUSINESS



"I DECIDED I WOULD REFUSE IT"

(Page 291)

ANGELA'S BUSINESS

BY

HENRY SYDNOR HARRISON

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
FREDERIC R. GRUGER



BOSTON AND NEW YORK
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To JACK

Who does not think as I do.

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I

BEING an author actually at work, and not an author being photographed at work by a lady admirer, he did not gaze large-eyed at a poppy in a crystal vase, one hand lightly touching his forehead, the other tossing off page after page in high godlike frenzy. On the contrary, the young man at the table yawned, lolled, sighed, scratched his ear, read snatches of Virginia Carter's "Letters to My Girl Friends" in the morning's "Post," read snatches of any printed matter that happened to be about, and even groaned. When he gazed, it was at no flower, but more probably at his clock, a stout alarm-clock well known to the trade as "Big Bill"; and the clock gazed back, since there was a matter between them this evening, and seemed to say, "Well, are you going to the Redmantle Club, or are you *not*?" But that was precisely the point on which the young man at the table had not yet made up his mind.

Of course, if he went to the Redmantle Club, he could not possibly spend the whole evening here, writing, and, oddly enough, this was at once a cogent reason for staying away from the Redmantle Club, and a seductive argument for going to the same. No lady admirer could ever grasp this paradox, but every true writer must admit that I know his secret perfectly.

From time to time, no diversion offering, the author would read over the last sentence he had written, which very likely ran as follows: —

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We have a society organized on the agreeable assumption that every woman, at twenty-five or thereabouts, finds herself in possession of a home, a husband, and three darling little curly-headed children.

Stimulated a trifle, he would thereupon sharpen up his pencil and charge forward a few sentences, as now:—

Slipshod people never test such old assumptions against actuality; they cling to what their grandfathers said, and call their slipshodness conservatism. So (like ostriches) they avoid the fact that there are three large and growing classes of women who simply have no relation to their comfortable old theory. I refer, of course, to the classes of Temporary Spinsters, of Permanent Spinsters, and of Married but Idle—childless wives living in boarding-houses, for example. Let no Old Tory conceive that he has disposed of the Woman Question until he can plainly answer: What are all these various women to DO in their fifteen waking hours a day?

Following which, he lit a cigarette in a moody manner, and sat frowning at the back of the head of his relative and secretary, who was clacking away all the while on a second-hand typewriter near by.

It will be contended that some hesitancy was fitting enough to the writer's thesis, Woman having raised perplexities in the bosoms of philosophers from the earliest times on. But perplexity did not happen to be the trouble with this philosopher, Charles King Garrott. These sentences Mr. Garrott so apathetically set down were the ancient commonplaces of his mind, the familiar bare bones of special researches long holding a unique position in his life. The dull General Public, with its economic eye, might yet rate him merely as a private tutor, formerly of Blaines College; the relative and secretary there might judge him only a young man of an unmasculine thin sedentary quality, who mysteriously gave his youth to producing piles of strange stuff that all had to be copied out on the typewriter. But, in the privacy of his own soul, Charles

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Garrott was, through all, not alone the coming American novelist (which rather went without saying), but, in that direct connection, probably the only man in the world who really understood Woman.

Old times used this phrase unscientifically; "understanding women" has acquired misleading connotations. The words seem to call up the picture of a purely gallant observer, one with a polished mustache and amorous gay eyes, sitting under a sidewalk awning and ogling out over a purplish drink. We may go so far as to state plainly that they call up the picture of a Frenchman. The young man at the table is scarcely imagined as this sort of authority, viewing Woman crudely as *La Femme*. As he could not put pencil to paper without revealing, Charles Garrott viewed Woman, never as *La Femme*, but exclusively as a Question. Himself the New Man obviously, he saw Woman solely as a Movement, meditated about her strictly as an Unrest. When he considered her in the concrete — and that he seldom did nowadays, if we need not count his friend, Mary Wing, who was as New as he, to say the least of it — his eye reviewed and criticized her, not as a Sex, but strictly as a human being against an environment. Charles Garrott would scientifically diagnose a Woman to her face, in a manner which she, poor creature, but little suspected.

Romance [he began again] left us with the sentimental tradition that a w——

"Charles!" said his relative and secretary, speaking for the first time in ten minutes, a long silence for him — "I'll thank you for your attention a moment."

"Certainly, Judge," said Charles Garrott, with that alacrity with which a true writer habitually welcomes an interruption.

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"Here, near the end of this story — passage I can't for the life of me. . . . Here! Seems to go like this: 'Let a man,' cried Dionysius, cracking walnuts with a sort of splendid sadness, 'but free his eyes from the magic of sex, and mask my words' — no! — let's see — '*mark* my words, Bishop, he shall see strange truths.'"

There was a pause.

"Mistake somewhere!" said the gentleman at the typewriter, with a chuckle. "Well, what's what?"

"No, that's right, I believe. Why, what's the matter with it?"

"Why! — there's no sense in it!"

"Oh — it's advanced talk, you know. Modern, epigrammatic stuff, you might call it."

"Conceding that, here's the bit about the nuts. That's where the mistake is, *I* claim. Let me see — 'cracking walnuts with a sort of *splendid* sadness.' Good gad, — that can't be right, Charles! 'Sober sadness,' 'sorrowful sadness' — something of that sort you meant, eh?"

The secretary had swung about suddenly, revealing a face almost startlingly handsome, fine-cut as a cameo, pink and white as a professional beauty's, and topped with a magnificent crown of snow-white hair.

"'Pathetic sadness,' now, my dear fellow? Go just a little better, would n't it?"

"Well — no, Judge, not just in this particular story. Fact is, it's meant to be a little queer, you see."

"It *is* queer, that's my point!" said the Judge, rather worried. "'Cracking walnuts with a sort of splendid sadness' — if the public understands *that*! — Well, as you like, of course."

Having thus washed his hands of all responsibility, the rela-

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tive gazed a moment at a little red "Nothing But Business, Please" sign that hung above his typewriter-table, hummed a bar or two in a sweet tenor voice, and resumed his now expert clacking.

Similarly his employer resumed his composition: —

Romance left us with the sentimental tradition that a woman's sex was a complete, indeed a glorious, justification of her existence (*v.* F. Dell: "Women as World Builders"). Because she some day would be, or might possibly be, a mother of children, she was set upon a pedestal and left there, exempt from further responsibilities meanwhile. The potentiality of motherhood became a claim to life-long support in idleness, etc., etc. —

Now, we have long understood that the controlling fact in the life of every man is the way in which he gets his living. We have long understood that the essential immorality is to get something for nothing. But only lately have we come to see how these two general laws apply, have always applied, to women. Only late —

But there the pencil, which had been dragging, came again to a halt.

This writing went forward in an old exercise-book, on the label of which a fine trembling hand had written "*French Composition.*" It was seen that firmer fingers had overwritten that inscription with another: "NOTES ON WOMEN." Here, in brief, the authority was reducing certain views to essay form, according to a plan he had: squeezing out the meat of his mind into the exercise-book, as the moral basis of a great new novel, nothing less. And the truth was that he had no sooner begun the stock-taking process than difficulties appeared, and the present want of ardor made itself felt. Faint doubts and questionings, indeed, knocked at Charles Garrott's mind in these days; not touching Woman, of course, but certainly seeming to touch his last year's formula for her. "I'm an ultra-modern with conservative reactions," he had thought to himself, with a sense of important discovery, but a night or two ago. And

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on the whole, he felt that that had explained him scientifically into the best company in the world.

The reference was to the one other existing person who, it was conceded, might possibly know as much about Woman as he, Charles, did. That one was a lady in Sweden. And, reassuringly enough, he had long since noted in the Swedish lady's bold modernism, also, this precise same tendency toward judicious reconsideration.

Suddenly the young man put away his writing, shut his table-drawer with a click, and said: —

"I'm going out for awhile, Judge — to a meeting of the Redmantle Club. Think I need a little stimulus."

He went away to the bedroom, thinking, but not of the Redmantle Club, for which, to say truth, he cared little. Nor were his thoughts in line with the swingeing sentences he had just been writing in the exercise-book. On the contrary, the young authority was openly inquiring of himself: *Was* economic independence the complete solution of the Unrest? *Were* there no Values in the world but Utilitarian Values?

The bedroom door shut, and Judge Blenso, who had replied with a mere busy nod to Charles's announcement, desisted from his clacking, and produced a late copy of "The Rider and Driver" from the little drawer of his typewriter-table. He began to look at pictures with a happy expression upon his striking face.

Why was Mr. Blenso called the Judge? An interesting point, on which I, for one, unluckily can shed no light. But if he has also been called a relative and secretary, that was for the sake of peace only. To say outright that this fine large gentleman was Charles Garrott's nephew (his half-nephew, to be exact) would necessitate a vast deal of explanatory genealogy. That was a fact, as the family Bibles of the Blensos

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and Minters clearly proved, but it is a fact that had better be quietly ceded. Judge Blenso was a relative, and it is quite true that his young half-uncle had been reared from infancy to address him as Uncle George. Garrott, who had no other nephew in the world, had always thought it a little unfair.

The Judge's disaster had come upon him in the prime of a gallant widowerhood. He had dived from an unfamiliar pier, one luckless day, in the interests of a stout young woman, who flattered herself that she was drowning. Diving too close to avoid her bulk, Charles's relative had struck his head upon a submerged beam which should not have been there; and the stout young woman, so far from drowning, had promptly proved that she could float enough for two. She had saved her rescuer's life, in short.

But the beam had had the last word in the encounter, after all. When Uncle George Blenso got well of his concussion, it was early discovered that he was just a little "different"; also that his nominal Real Estate and Loans business downtown was far, far from solvent. It was accordingly proposed in the family that Uncle George should go to the Garrott place in Prince William County; but this proposal had been rejected at once by Uncle George, who protested indignantly that he was a city man. The upshot was that Charles, being the only city relative extant, had invited the Judge to share his third floor here, turning out his young friend and room-mate, Donald Manford, for that express purpose. That had seemed to settle the issue. But no; very soon the lively kinsman was pointing out that he would need money, of course, for clothes, club-dues, and so on, and accordingly it was arranged that he should become Charles's literary assistant on a regular salaried basis.

It happened that Charles had as yet had occasion to pub-

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lish but a single fiction ("The Truth About Jennie"; see "Favorite Magazine," for August, 1910). He had, indeed, as much need of a private chaplain as of a secretary. The peculiarities of the case, thus, often struck and amused him; and they did so now as, opening the door of the bedroom, hatted and coated, he saw his secretary's still youthful head bowed pleasantly over the magazine.

"Ah, my dear fellow, there you are!" said the secretary, with just a little jump.

And putting down his reading-matter in a manner suggesting that, of course, he had had to kill time somehow while waiting for Charles, he went on at once in an agreeable confidential voice: —

"By the by, I intended to ask you — you've heard about this Miss Trevenna? Gad, you know, Charles! Her father won't let her name be mentioned!"

The employer eyed him gravely, pulling on his gloves. The story alluded to was not unknown to him: how one modern girl, claiming more Freedom than existed, had too rashly crossed the great gulf, and how, her enterprise proving fatally unsuccessful, she had lately come home again. He felt very sorry for Miss Trevenna.

"Fact! — her mother visits her in secret, in lodgings," said his secretary, dropping his eager voice further. "A sad case — sad, yes — but, my dear fellow, can we allow our girls to run off with other people's husbands? No! Morals," said Judge Blenso, sternly, "are the bulwark of the nation! — that's what *I* say! Am I right, Charles?"

Charles said that he was perfectly right. He then proposed that the Judge should knock off work for the night, forthwith. But the Judge looked rather shocked at the suggestion, and began to clack vigorously at Dionysius.



"NO! MORALS ARE THE BULWARK OF THE NATION!"

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"There's really no hurry about this short stuff, you know. Why not go down and cheer Mrs. Herman up a bit? She always appreciates a call from you."

The relative's hand irresistibly rose to his mustache.

"A fine woman, a charmin' fine widow-woman," said he, in his rich voice. "But! — business *before* pleasure, Charles. That's *my* way, my boy."

However, the ringing motto seemed a little too good to live up to. Hardly had the front door shut on Charles when Judge Blenso — he rather insisted on the official title, now that he was secretary — hooded his old typewriter for the night, turned down the light in the green-domed lamp on the table, and descended to visit his landlady. That he had small reverence for his half-uncle's New Thinking now became clear. The Judge left the Studio (as he himself had christened it), chuckling silently to himself, and on the steps began to chant aloud a sort of gay recitative of his own composition. The chant went a beat to every step, thus: "Cracking — piffle — walnuts — piffle — in a — sort of — piffle — sadness!"

II

THE Redmantle Club was more advanced than Charles, and he knew it. And when he told his relative that he was going to it for stimulus, he must have been secretly well aware that it was but a treacherous stimulus he was likely to get.

The Club had been founded by Mrs. Frederick B. Seaman, who had once had a novel published, long ago, at a nominal expense of two hundred and fifty dollars. The name Redmantle had some significance which eludes memory, but there seems to be no doubt that the founder's original idea had been merely to gather together a few congenial persons to abuse the publishers to. The times, however, chanced to be ripe for a broader forum, one where the most advanced women of both sexes could meet and freely speak out the New Mind. The Redmantle had seemed to fill the long-felt want, from the start. Now its meetings began with a Programme, and you may be sure nobody bothered with such small fry as a publisher. The Redmantle speakers won salvos only by completely exterminating the Family and the Home, or proving beyond successful contradiction that Love Is Going Out.

By arriving late on purpose, Charles Garrott missed a speech by Mary Wing on the New Education, for which he was rather sorry. For a year or more he had regarded Miss Wing as one of his best friends, and he always liked to hear her demolish, in characteristically forceful sentences, the surviving tradition that the true object of education is to ornament

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gentility. He liked to see Mary Wing lay her hand upon her breast, her Self, and cry out: "So long as I live, whatever I do or think or am, the center of the world for me is *here*. I will not conjugate dead languages or recite the imports of Uruguay, before I learn the first fact about my Self — my body and my mind, my background and my opportunity!" On the other hand, by his late arrival, Charles missed Miss Frothingham's advanced harp-solo, and Professor Clarence Pollock's tribute to a celebrated lady anarchist. As to the elder Miss Hodger's address on the New Ego, he was not much less opportune. Miss Hodger was nearing her peroration as the writing tutor appeared at the door.

He took up a position just inside, and looked through the parlor smoke. The smoke emanated principally from the ladies, who were, however, as five to one. Miss Hodger towered by a baby-grand piano, one hand upon an album, and clamored for her Rights. She demanded these Rights of hers, whatever they were, with such iteration and passion that a kindly, simple person, had there been any such present, must needs have cried out, "Give that lady her Rights there! — and quick about it!"

Miss Hodger's was a tall figure, bony but commanding; she had a flat chest, a tangled mane of sorrel hair and a face somewhat like a horse's. Of her argument, little need be said; you may find it in detail in the very books where Miss Hodger found it. It was, in sum, an unanswerable demonstration of woman's sacred duty of Developing her Ego. The exposé of the Home proved particularly searching; it brought loud cheers. Much Miss Hodger said, too, of the Higher Law and the Richness of Personality, of Contributions to the Race and Enhancement of the Life Stream. In Charles Garrott's ears one sentence seemed to ring and stick above the rest:

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"Fiercely and relentlessly shall Modern Woman hack away all that impedes her in her Self-Development — all, I care not what it is!"

She ended with a kind of yell, thumped the album twice, and strode away from the baby-grand. There were bursts of clapping, a chorus of approval, and then general buzzing and commotion. The Programme was over. Everybody was standing: all talking, nobody left to listen. Servants entered bearing trays of light refreshments; light, indeed, they looked. It was the Redmantle's social hour, the hour of good, free, courageous talk.

Charles Garrott moved into the noisy room. All his sides, of course, were not known to his fellow members, and yet he had a standing here. He was recognized as one of the pioneer Rightsers; his last year's speech before the Club, on "Work for Women," had been generally adjudged a first-rate piece of Modern Thinking. And all the Redmantlers seemed to like to talk to him, too; they would get round him and back him up into corners in a way he scarcely liked. Mrs. Frederick B. Seaman looked as if she meant to kiss him. "And now," she said, beaming, "for a good long talk about my new book." He cleverly evaded her, but in so doing fell right into the net of the hearthside anarchist, Professor Pollock, who drew him in with a hand as large and soft as a beefsteak. Pollock was a thin, bald young man, with the conventional flowing necktie, and the New disappearing chin, and secretly Garrott had always thought him a most terrific jackass.

"How are we going to relieve this White Slave situation, Garrott? How? How?"

"It is one of the grave problems of the day," said Charles. "At the moment I can only answer, as President Taft answered the workman at Cooper —"

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"What, you admit that you have no remedy to lay down? None whatever?"

"At the moment, none. It is one of the grave —"

The younger and even freer Miss Hodger, who had been hovering near, exploded a mouthful of cigarette smoke, and exclaimed excitedly:—

"Oh, sister, only think! Mr. Garrott has no remedy for the White Slave situation!"

They thought it most reprehensible of him to have no remedy, and closed in on him, bursting with theirs. "Have you not considered the necessities of the living wage!" demanded the elder Miss Hodger's joyless voice, suddenly at his elbow. "Living wage — bah!" said Professor Pollock, hotly. "A mere sop — a mere feeble temporizing —" "You must get into their homes!" cried the youngest Miss Hodger, who admitted homes only as places to get into. "You must take them very, very young . . ."

So they fell to quarreling among themselves, and Charles Garrott wriggled away, wishing that he were as cocksure about anything as the Hodgers were about everything, and resolving to try to be henceforward. So he eluded Miss Frothingham, who was handicapped by her harp and nearsighted besides, but ran at once against a crimson-faced woman in a purple negligée, a stranger to him he felt sure, but she asked him at once, in an angry sort of way, "Don't you favor a public reception *immediately* to splendid Flora Trevenna?" In spite of his resolution, Charles's eyes fell before the threatening gaze. It seemed to be the sixth time, at least, that he had caught the name of Miss Trevenna among the Turkish fumes, but the idea of the public reception immediately was new to him. "Don't you think she's struck a great Blow for Freedom?" demanded the crimson one, with rising indignation.

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"Don't you think she's weakened the hold of the horrible Tyranny of Marriage?"

Thus the Modern got stimuli, of just the sort he had known he would get if he came. Members jostled him, blew smoke in his eyes, laid demonstrative hands upon him. All about him in the dense air, he heard hot voices crying out incorrect statements of things they had lately misread; at best loose bits plucked from authors whom he, Charles, had turned inside out year before last, as like as not. And why, he wondered, need Redmantlers *look* so queer? Why must new ideas, if only the least bit radical, invariably attract people who liked to wear breakfast-gowns in the evening, people with uncombed hair and burning pop-eyes, people who had little chin, indeed, but yet far more chin than humor?

And then suddenly, in the midst of the febrile Newness, the young authority found himself talking to a sweet-faced girl from the country, who looked at him with woman's eyes, and spoke simple little things in a pretty voice: "Do you play bridge? Do you tango? It must be *wonderful* to be a writer. . . ."

It was really an extraordinary experience.

The development came by way of his good friend, Mary Wing, whom Charles reached at last with a certain sense of making port. Miss Wing, it must be known, was the assistant principal of the great City High School, where no woman had ever been before her, where she herself had arrived only after eight years' incessant battling upward. She was also, this long time, president of the State Branch of the National League for Education Reform, with the prospect of presently mounting far higher, to nothing less, if you please, than the General Secretaryship of that rich and powerful body. Considering her history and her exploits, it seemed that she

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should have been six feet tall, with a gaze like a Gorgon and a jaw like Miss Hodger's. But Mary Wing was actually a slight and almost fragile-looking creature, with quite girlish blue eyes in a colorless face that wore an air of deceptive delicacy.

She was two months older than her friend, Mr. Garrott, which made her thirty in December. And she was undoubtedly the most distinguished person in that strident room, not excepting (at the present writing) Mr. Garrott himself.

The assistant principal was discovered leaning against a bookcase, eating sandwiches in large bites, two bites to a sandwich, and paying no attention to the earnest talk of the group she seemed to belong to. "It must be the effect of speaking," she said to Garrott. "I'm ravenous. But goodness, there's no nourishment in these little paper things." And almost at once she demanded, firm as a Redmantler, if he had ever been to call on Dr. Flower; some cousin or other of hers, this was, who (through her connections in the educational world) had lately taken an appointment as lecturer at the Medical School. Charles had agreed to call on this worthy, it seemed, but naturally he had n't done so.

She chided him for his remissness. It was a mild enough reproof, in all conscience; yet it was at that moment that he, with his diagnostic tendency, caught himself eyeing Mary Wing critically, as if she were any other Redmantler. And then he seemed to become aware that, without knowing it exactly, he must have been eyeing Mary Wing critically for some time past now.

"He'll need some patients, too, to eke out. I must look into that," said she, popping the second half of a sandwich into her mouth. "I suppose you don't know anybody who intends to be sick soon, in a costly way?"

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He shook his head. He himself, he intimated, had no idea of getting sick merely to oblige her rural cousins.

"What does that girl do?" he added, almost irritably. "Did n't you tell me there was a girl, twenty-five years old? Why does n't she work, and eke out?"

"She does work. She runs the house."

"Apparently you did n't see Mrs. Waldo's statement that quarter of an hour a day was quite enough for that so-called work."

"Do you believe that?"

"I know it's false. Still there are ninety-six quarters of an hour in a day, people estimate. What sort of girl is she? Little nitwit, I suppose?"

"She's my cousin."

"Lots of people have little nitwits for cousins. Why does n't she pitch in and earn her keep, like a free personality — as our friend Miss Hodger would say?"

Miss Wing was observing him with a strange air, resembling amusement. "You must really ask her that yourself some time, Mr. Garrott."

"I'll do it with pleasure, the first time ever I clap eyes on her."

"Well, then," said she, with a sudden laugh, "do it *now*!"

And thereupon, within ten seconds, the managing young woman had whisked him around a knot of Redmantlers, whisked him around the bookcase, and was saying in merry, efficient tones: —

"Angela, this is the famous Mr. Garrott you've heard so much about — my cousin, Miss Flower! Mr. Garrott's very anxious to —"

She paused wickedly, but after all finished without malice, "To make your acquaintance." And so Mr. Garrott did not

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have to ask the country cousin on the spot what she was thinking about not to earn her keep.

The girl had been standing against the other corner of the bookcase all the time, it seemed. She was talking, in a polite sort of way, to another guest — Mr. Tilletts, the wealthy and seeking widower — and fanning away tobacco smoke with a hand too small for the heavy odds. Mr. Tilletts was removed at once by the thoroughly competent Miss Wing.

Charles Garrott, recovered from the sudden little surprise, looked at the cousin with interest, and was at no loss for easy conversation. While he knew of Miss Flower very well, he pointed out, he had had no idea that she was here this evening. In fact, he had n't gathered that Miss Flower went in for — well, for this sort of thing, exactly.

"Why — I really don't, I'm afraid," said she in her soft voice. "I don't suppose I understand it all very well. I just came — because Cousin Mary invited me!"

She hesitated, then laughed, and finally said: "And you see, it's the first party I've been invited to since I came here to live!"

"And you like parties?"

"Yes, so much. Don't you?"

The remark, at, and as to, the Redmantle, seemed delightful.

"I did, when I was young and gay. Now, I never seem to have time to enjoy myself any more. You've been meeting a good many people, I suppose?"

"Well, no, — not many yet. Really hardly any." The girl laughed, and again showed a charming naïveté: "You're the very first man I've met since we came here — except Mr. Tilletts!"

"But that's a tremendous exception, Miss Flower. You appreciate that he's one of our leading swains?"

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"Oh, *is* he!" she said, a little disconcerted. "Why—I hope he did n't think I was rude! I thought he was—somebody's father, you see, or uncle. . . ."

Charles Garrott regarded the cousin pleurably, with no thought of cross-examination. He, the authority, it need scarcely be said, had recognized this girl at sight. Manifestly, she was none other than the Nice Girl, the Womanly Woman, whom he and all moderns were forever holding up to scorn. Doubtless it was merely the increased conservative reaction: but Charles, for the moment, seemed conscious of no scorn in him toward Miss Angela Flower.

The cousin was pretty; not beautiful, no throne-shaker; but pretty, and attractive-looking. Wholly normal she looked, quite engagingly so, with her fine clear skin, smooth dark hair, and large limpid eyes. In her manner there was something soft, simple, and sweet, an ingenuous desire to please and be pleased; Miss Flower was feminine, in short, — it could not be denied. In a company, where the women acted like men, and the men acted like the Third Sex, this girl seemed content to remind you, like her mothers, that she was a woman.

Her conversation, intrinsically speaking, was not remarkable. But — the insidious contrast again — in a Midst where everybody else was conversing remarkably, plain conversation itself became an episode, and a charming one. She spoke of bridge, saying that she and Cousin Mary were hoping to "get up a table" one night very soon; of Mitchellton, where she had lived seven years till September; of the maxixe and the smallness of the house Mary Wing had taken for them; a dozen such un-New simplicities. And then, as she happened to be saying something about the strangeness of the city, "just at first," Charles Garrott exclaimed suddenly, rather pleased: —

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"There's a friend of yours, at any rate, Miss Flower — Donald Manford! The last one in the world you'd expect to meet here."

The engineer must have just come in; over bobbing heads, through waving arms, his fine figure and bronzed face had been suddenly glimpsed at the doorway. This young man was another cousin of Mary Wing's; she, indeed, had raised him by hand; and he looked hardly less alien at the Redmantle Club than Miss Angela Flower herself.

To Garrott's astonishment, Miss Flower did not know Donald from Adam.

"Is *that* Mr. Manford?" she exclaimed, surprised apparently by her cousin's cousin's good looks. "Of course I've known *of* him for the longest time, but —"

"Why, that's strange — he's like a brother to Mary Wing. But then," said he, reconsidering, "Donald's out of the city half the time, and does nothing but work when he's here."

"Oh! Cousin Mary said she was going to bring him to see us some time — but —"

He enlarged upon the young engineer's industry (trained into him by Miss Wing); explained how he was busier than usual just now in view of his coming trip to Wyoming; mentioned the great Mora dam and cut-off project, on which he expected a commission under Gebhardt himself.

"And your cousin Mary, too," he concluded, in the justest way, "is an awfully busy person, you see."

"Yes, of course, I know! She does work *terribly* hard, does n't she?"

After the slightest pause, the girl added: "It's such a pity she has to, don't you think so?"

On which Donald Manford dropped cleanly from Charles's

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mind, and he inquired with authoritative interest, artfully concealed: "How do you mean, exactly?"

"Well — I don't know —"

She looked at him, laughing a little, as if not certain how far she could say what she meant; but finding his gaze so extremely encouraging, she went on seriously: —

"Don't you think when a woman gets really wrapped up in business — and all that — she's apt to miss some of the best things of life?"

He might have laughed at the quaint deliciousness of that, to him, Charles Garrott. But he did n't.

"That's the great question your sex is working out, is n't it?" he said, carefully. "I don't suppose work — just moderate, useful occupation — ever hurt anybody much, do you?"

"Oh, no! — of course not. That's just what I believe, too. I believe everybody ought to have work to do. But — all the work is n't teaching or going to an office — or being a public speaker — do you think so?"

"Oh, never. No, indeed."

She hesitated and said, laughing: "I know *I* find it work enough just keeping a house and doing the housework — and being a daughter and sister!"

It was at that point that Charles's purely conventional look altered, his inmost self pricking up its ears, as it were. And a moment later the simple girl said, in the naïvest way imaginable, what seemed immediately to stick in his scientific Woman lore like a burr: —

"Of course I have n't studied and read like Cousin Mary, but truly it seems to me that — just making a home is sometimes all the business a woman could possibly attend to. . . ."

He stood looking down at her in the strangest way, engrossed with novel reflections. She would have been aston-

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ished had she guessed how her chance phrase had set this man's mind to working, behind the pleasant mask. In her innocence she clearly did not understand, even after all the speeches, how at the Redmantle Club we talked of all businesses, and everybody's business, but never the business of making a home.

The reactionary talk proceeded for a space. But shortly, there were signs that the meeting was about to adjourn. And it was clear to Charles, as a true writer of a philosophical tendency, that he should be glad to be alone for a space now, and to think.

He said suddenly: —

"Miss Flower, I want very much to introduce Donald Manford to you, before I go. May I do it now? Won't you promise to hold fast to this bookcase, and not budge till I come back?"

The girl promised. She seemed pleased by his thought of her, but sorry over his own impending departure. "Oh, do *you* have to go now?" she said, and her woman's eyes seemed to add quite plainly: "I'd lots rather talk to you than meet Mr. Manford."

The young authority smiled at her, and disappeared into the company. Directly, he was back again, the engineer in tow.

Donald, found conversing in a nook with another handsome guest, a Miss Helen Carson, had rather resisted removal and been hauled off, truth to tell, in some ill-humor. But Charles, for his part, felt warmly pleased with himself, bringing together these two nice, normal cousins of Mary Wing's. The girl too, looked pleased; her eyes were shining, a pretty color tinged her young cheek.

"I'm so glad to meet you, Mr. Manford, at last. We're really sort of connections, are n't we — once removed!"

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"Yes, I believe so! — that's fine. Delighted to know you," said Mr. Manford. "I hope you enjoyed the speeches this evening?"

"Well — that's hardly a fair question!" laughed Miss Angela, looking from one man to the other. "Are you a — regular member?"

The query brought applauding laughter from Mr. Garrott and a weak groan from Mr. Manford. "You mean I look like one? Oh, that's a blow! No, honor bright," he added, "I leave all the advanced stuff to Mary."

Then Charles took his leave, in the friendliest manner. He felt, in an odd sort of way, that there had sprung a kind of bond between this girl and him, all the realer in that she, of course, was so unconscious of it. So kindly did he feel toward Mary Wing's cousin, indeed, that when she hoped, in her charming natural way, that he would come to see them some time soon, he, though anything but a caller, actually came very near promising to do so.

Miss Flower's eyes regretted his going; they were feminine eyes. Charles smiled into them again, pressed her hand, and turned away toward the Studio, to think.

By the door, he ran again into Mary Wing. The educator had changed her position, but was still eating sandwiches. She beckoned Charles nearer, in her confident way, and said: —

"Do you remember my telling you how much I wanted to see Donald settled before he went off, and sketching a few of the qualifications the girl must have? And your saying that what I wanted was a syndicate?"

He remembered, he said.

"See how I treasure up your *bon mots*. Well, there she is."

And she nodded down the room, not even in the direction

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of her cousin from the country, but to none other than Miss Carson, now found conversing with the heated Pollock.

"Oh," said Garrott.

"Why," exclaimed Mary, the moment her eyes had followed her nod, "I wonder where Donald is!"

He decided to pretend not to hear. Gazing at Miss Carson in the light of this information, he was ready to concede that she seemed a sound enough modern choice. Well-connected, well-to-do, and completely educated, the young lady in question, while now taking "two years out" to please her mother, was next year going to work, to please herself — of course, in Social Service. Young and alluring Miss Carson looked, indeed. But something in the mould of her smooth chin, confronting the young man who had none, seemed to serve notice that, though she was beautiful, she knew that Women's Egos must be free.

"Don't you think she may be a little firm? I mean, for Donald?"

"Firm? Not a bit! — she's human and competent. Heavens! — you don't want Donald to marry a helpless little silly, do you? But what on earth became of him, did you notice? I made him come here after me specially to meet her, and I had them talking so nicely —"

Then Charles said firmly: "I just introduced him to Miss Flower. It seemed you'd neglected to do so. By the way, your cousin's charming."

"Oh," said Mary, rather drawn-out.

And, after a rebuking pause, she added in pedagogic tones: "Well, I'm sorry you took him away from Helen. I'm serious about this match, you see. It would almost reconcile me to giving Donald up."

The young man's look at his old friend was certainly criti-

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cal now. And he refused to feel in the least sorry for his interference with her cool eu-marital scheme. For, taking even the most liberal view, Modernity was for Moderns; probably always would be. What under the sun did a fellow like Donald want with a wife who would prove him wrong about a cosine, and keep him up jawing about Mrs. Gilman till two o'clock in the morning?

From the Turkish air of the Redmantle, Charles Garrott passed out into the bracing November night. Two blocks farther along, he passed the door of another club, a completely male one. And down the wide steps, between the columnar lights, there came shambling a large, loose-jointed, round-faced man in a brown felt hat, and joined him.

"Well, Charlie."

"Good evening, Mr. Wing."

Having caught stride, the two men walked on in silence. This Mr. Wing was Mary's Uncle Oliver, an interesting individual in his way, member of the City School Board, and in the business world known sometimes as a "capitalist," sometimes again as a loan-shark. When in the vein, Mr. Wing could be conversational enough, and his morose air at present indicated that he had lost not less than three dollars at the Bellevue Club card-tables this evening.

When they had proceeded some three blocks in total silence, Charles, emerging from his brown study, said idly:—

"Mr. Wing, do you believe in the Woman's Movement?"

Hearing no reply to his query, he glanced around, and found Mr. Wing slowly shaking his head. It seemed to be a time-gaining sort of shake; it undertook to hold the floor temporarily, promising good sound argument to follow. Charles waited. But Uncle Oliver did not speak; he only continued

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to shake his head, slowly and profoundly. And when the two had traversed half a block in this provisional sort of way, the money-lender suddenly turned up the steps of the house where he lived, still shaking his head.

Halfway up the steps, he looked back over his shoulder, and said: —

“Well, good-night, Charlie.”

“Good-night, Mr. Wing.”

III

THE first thing the author did, on opening the door of the Studio, was to look at the clock. Big Bill pointed to but five minutes of eleven. Good! There remained a clean hour and a half before he would have to cease work and go to bed, to wake up a private tutor.

All the lethargy of the earlier evening seemed to have vanished now, under the strong reverse stimulus of the Redmantle Club. Having turned up the light in his gas-lamp, the young man stood a moment, thinking intently, and then sat down at his writing-table. The table was twelve years old, and had been to college and law-school. It was worn and stained, but still strong, and bore up, besides the lamp and clock, not only a large array of writer's paraphernalia, but a considerable floating miscellany, too, including a clipping or so, several unanswered letters, a stray tobacco-pouch, a thick exercise-book, and the particular volume on Women he happened to be reading at the moment. Ignoring these, the proprietor drew from the back of his table drawer a capacious brown-paper folder, and from the folder plucked three typewritten sheets, held together with a clip.

It was seen that the topmost of these sheets bore a heading: MARY WING. And for some moments the author of them sat in stillness, conning over the lines that followed: the magnanimous lines he had prepared with such pains long ago, and then tamely put to sleep in a drawer.

He had composed this eulogy last winter, to help Miss Wing in her campaign for the assistant principalship of the

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High School. His plan, of which she knew nothing to this day, had been cunning and complete. First he would get this "write-up" into the "Persons in the Foreground" department of "Willcox's," the famous and enormously circulated weekly; then he would have the "Post" reprint it; finally he would induce all the local papers to print glowing editorials demanding, "Is this prophethood to be without honor in her own country?" Unquestionably a most helpful plan; but characteristically, Mary had not waited for it. By some "pull" she had, she had put her little matter through months ahead of schedule, and Judge Blenso had just finished typing the "write-up," late one winter's afternoon, when Charles was summoned to the telephone to be greeted by the first woman assistant principal in history. He, of course, had been delighted with her success. And yet — had he not felt even then that the episode was typical of a positively manly independence?

Now he read over his forgotten words with cool judiciality: —

Her name was in newspaper headlines before she was out of her teens; and many and many a time since. She wished to be a doctor, and the Medical School would not take her in. And shortly this slim girl, with her sweetly-cut chin and ethereal eyes, had raised the whole State on the issue of principle thus thrown down: Did a woman have the right to study, or not? She stormed the courts for an injunction, she set the legislature by the ears for a special act. The story of her personal interview with the Governor, at the height of the disturbance, is often told to this day; but never by any friend of the Governor's. And then, when she was within a step of winning the long fight, her father died suddenly and she faced the immediate necessity of earning a living.

Farther along, the author's eye found the particular passage that had been in his mind from the start, the part about the National League for Education Reform. Having recounted

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how the bequest of Rufus B. Zecker's millions had "assured the permanence and ultimate triumph of the League's programme," the generous "puff" went on: —

What the National League contemplates is nothing less than the remaking of our entire educational system, on the basis of a new perception of truth, namely: that education is, not learning at all, but purely the process of fitting the individual for effectual relations with his (or her) environment. With the League's propaganda to that end, under the brilliant leadership of Horace Gurney Ames, Miss Wing has been closely associated for the past seven years. Her work here has been, indeed, the dominant part of her career. . . .

The dominant part of her life, he would better have written. And that was precisely the trouble.

The sheets dropped from the young man's hands, and he gazed unwinking at the green translucence of his lamp. His mind skipped back to a day in early September, when Mary and her mother had come home from their two weeks in the metropolis — Mrs. Wing still looking rather crushed from the overwhelming rush of New York, Mary radiant with the hope that before long she might go back to New York, to stay there the rest of her life. For on that journey she had abruptly learned that the League directors had their eyes upon her with reference to their General Secretaryship, which was to become vacant next March. Undoubtedly, the brilliant Dr. Ames had sounded her pretty directly on this point. Undoubtedly, too, it would be another long step up for Mary, making her, in the educational world at least, a figure of national consequence. Once again, of course, Charles Garrott had been delighted. And yet it was clear to him now that his Modernity had first felt conservative reactions on that very day.

Through the shut door of the bedroom there came a gentle

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snoring. After the day's secretarial labor, Judge Blenso slept well. Charles rose and walked his carpet, much worn with a writer's meditative pacing.

The wisest of us generalize from the instances that lie nearest us. How far this young man's views on Woman had been moulded by contrasting the maturing uselessness of his pupil Grace Chorister, say, with the fine efficiency of Miss Wing, he himself could not have said. But at least he knew that Mary Wing had long embodied the best of the whole Movement for him. He had held her up, in season and out, as a perfect example of the New Woman at her best. And Mary Wing was that, he declared it now; the real thing, as different as possible from the hollow shams of the Redmantle Club. Of course — of *course* — she had a right, just the same right that a man had, to put away her mother, her family and friends, and follow away the star of her work. But . . . if only she showed a little more appreciation of values apart from My Career; if only you could imagine Mary sometimes speaking of Being a Daughter and Being a Sister.

Yes; those were the words that rose naturally in his mind. Beyond doubt, Mary Wing's cousin from the backwoods had given a push to Charles Garrott's thought; he would have been the first to admit that. Not merely had Miss Angela happened to body forth, in the most pleasing, unconscious way, that very type which all Redmantlers so derided; but further, she had artlessly used a phrase which, to his authoritative mind, had helped to scientize her case at a bound. For of course the most scientific modern demand as to Miss Angela's class came simply down to this, that all Temporary Spinsters should have some regular business to occupy their hands and heads. Very well, then, laughed this little girl: What about the *Business* of Making Homes?

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The phrase, connoting so much more than mere "keeping house," was worthy of a writer. And when had this other doctrine grown so strong and sure, that the Business of Making a Career, of Developing My Ego, was necessarily the biggest business in the world?

In the silence of the large dim Studio, the young man stood stroking the bridge of his nose, somewhat worriedly. It was a well-cut bridge, and held three brown freckles.

It occurred to him, not for the first time, that he himself was helping to spread the egoistic doctrine referred to. He remembered his novel, in short: his Old Novel, as he already called it, albeit it was his only one, and he and Judge Blenso had completed it but two weeks ago, to a day. This novel, in manuscript, was now in the hands of the great house of Willcox Brothers Company, whom Charles, after due thought, had selected as his publishers. Willcox's offer, and the contract, might come by any mail now.

To the writing, and infinite rewriting, of this first work had gone the scant leisure of more than four years. Its title-page read: "BONDWOMEN: A Novel of Modern Marriage." (The Judge had first typed the title *BANDWOMEN*, as if it were a Novel of Female Bandsmen, which had annoyed Charles very much.) Considering the cunning with which he had labored to "keep the story moving," it could scarcely be doubted, that "Bondwomen" was destined to have a large sale. And that, in fact, was just the danger; that was precisely the reason that he, the author, felt this sense of moral responsibility. Young married women, young impressionable Temporary Spinsters everywhere, would soon be reading this book, and moulding their characters upon it. He, of course, had never preached any of the wilder, Trevenna Modernity. But all the same . . . That passage there, for instance, where

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Lily Stender, in the lonely vigil on the terrace, reviews the status of Parasitic Woman and decides to leave her husband, and grow her Soul: certainly the probability was that intelligent women all over the world (he would have to grant British and Colonial rights at once, no doubt) would shortly be devouring that keen, advanced Thinking; and, it was to be feared, a general exodus from Homes would follow. In his mind's eye, Charles saw armies of women rising and packing Gladstone bags in the stilly night, and stealing forth, just as the dawn whitened the east, to join *Lily Stender* in lifting marriage to the Higher Plane, by means of Commerce.

He had put much of Mary Wing into *Lily*; he knew that. But then he had n't taken it in, in those days, how serious Mary was as to — what was the word of that mad ass Hodger? — fiercely hacking away whatever impeded her in her Self-Development.

Had not the moment rather come when some one, some all-seeing and completely modern authority, should resolutely sound the Note of Warning? Was it so sure that careering Egoism had anything more valuable to give the world than the old virtues which it flouted? Beauty, charm, and cheer, tenderness, selfless sympathy, all that mothering meant: was it not ridiculous to ignore these enormous contributions to the work of the world, because, forsooth, they could not show an immediate cash return?

Now all the clocks of the city — all, that is, that were right, and had bells — began to sound midnight. But the absorbed author and authority paced on, aware of no sound. He was thinking, with something like excitement, of his next novel, "Bondwomen's" greater successor, for which he was now just struggling to fix his point of view, straighten out his "moral plot," by means of notes in the old French exercise-book.

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Long as he had sensed a certain spiritual starkness in his first novel, long as he had looked forward to his second, the vital questions concerning his new "line" had never yet been settled in his mind. . . . Well, suppose that, with a frank, courageous change of front, he employed the New Novel to sound the wholesome Note of Warning; suppose that he boldly took a Home-Maker for his heroine, for example, and justified her — justified her *scientifically* — as no modern thinker had ever justified her before. . . .

The striking idea was not a new one altogether; but its possibilities, suddenly opening out, rapidly grew more and more interesting. Unfortunately, before it could be developed in even the smallest degree, it was abruptly interfered with by a most unwelcome intrusion of the practical.

Charles Garrott was a tutor. He had turned eagerly to his table, to capture certain phrases at least, while they were yet hot in his mind. But now, chillingly, his eye fell upon that other exercise-book, lying there publicly atop the volume on Women. At a glance that book looked exactly like its sister, kept hidden in a drawer; but in fact there was a boundless distinction. No hand had overwritten the label of that book there raising it to the peerage, as it were. That book was just a common book: "French Composition." And it was known to contain uncorrected exercises, forty sentences at least, which must be tutorially attended to, before Charles Garrott slept this night.

There followed a brief struggle; but it could end in only one way. Charles, with no good grace, sat at his table and clutched up a fat blue pencil.

It was a galling occurrence. Yet a man, of course, must live, whether cynical Frenchmen can see the necessity or not. And the tutoring, say what you would against it, was the best

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net result of a gradual sifting process, designed to find what would yield the largest amount of money for the least amount of work. So had Charles Garrott bent his life, to be a writer. Bred casually to the law, he had thrown over the encouraging beginnings of a practice directly he found that clients expected to take all a man's time, including nights even. Teaching he did not love, and yet, as he had enjoyed an excellent education, it "came easier" than anything else. His boast to friends, indeed, was that he could teach anything, whether he had ever heard of it before or not; and it was a fact that at a private school once — years ago, in the interval between college and law-school — he had taught Spanish on three days' notice, keeping, as he said, precisely one page and a half ahead of his class the whole year through. But teaching Ancient Languages at Blaines College was found, upon fair experiment, to involve too many papers in the Studio, conferences with boys, annoying teachers' meetings, and similar invasions of a writer's privacy. Besides, it was not nearly lucrative enough, after the coming of the Judge, who drew twenty-five dollars a month as Secretary, besides his keep.

Thus had evolved the private tutor, with a waiting-list. Thus it was that probably the only living compeer of the lady in Sweden must put aside his Thinking to-night, to peruse and criticize such stuff as this: —

16. *Bon jour, Monsieur le Curé! Avez vous vu le grand cheval de mon oncle, le médecin?*

Oh, detestable!

The two French exercise-books — twins with what a difference! — had started life equally as the property of a certain dear old lady, who had been spurred into studious endeavor by reading in a magazine that Roman Cato learned

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Greek at eighty. She had pointed out to her daughter, quite excitedly, that she herself was but seventy-one, and French was easier, besides; and that evening she had telephoned to Charles. The old lady wrote a very neat but virtually illegible hand, employing the finest Spencerian pen ever seen: —

23. *Non, petit Henri, non; votre sœur Marie n'est pas jamais aussi méchante que vous fûmes hier soir.*

The author's golden moments fled.

Nevertheless, before he went to bed, Charles Garrott did produce from his drawer that other private book of his (the front part of which, also, was stuffed with observations about the Curé and naughty little Henry). Here, for what time he had, the young modern set down, on a fresh page, preliminary Notes, such as, indeed, contrasted oddly with those inscribed in the earlier evening. And when he shut up his book to go to bed, he did it with an air, and spoke aloud: —

“Let 'em bite on that!”

From his tone, you might have supposed that all the Red-mantlers of the world would come to-morrow and look at these novel words of his. That, of course, was far from being the case: these were his inviolable secrets. Yet so real were his imaginings to the young man, so reactionary seemed even the thought of a Novel of Warning, that an unmistakable defiance had tinged his voice as he spoke. And particularly did this defiant air seem to extend to his excellent friend, Mary Wing.

Charles Garrott went to bed that night thinking defiantly of Mary (and almost tenderly of Mary's so different cousin); and on succeeding afternoons, when he took his walks abroad, he did not turn his steps, as was frequently his habit, toward streets where the advanced assistant principal was likely to be met.

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None the less, he did meet Mary on the street, before the week was out; and then the case was such that the secret sense of disloyalty faded, and Charles saw that he had been right all along. Mary, in short, was found parading Washington Street, where the largest possible number of people would be certain to see her, in the company of the too celebrated Miss Trevenna. And then the authority thought of the Home-Making cousin more sympathetically than ever; though he did not guess that the cousin, chancing to see him and his ladies from an upstairs window, was also thinking, not unsympathetically, of him.

IV

IT was not Charles's fault that he did not see Miss Angela, to-day, as she saw him; the sight of her would have been agreeable to him, at that moment particularly. But the window from which the pretty cousin looked out happened to be a considerable distance away; and she gathered nothing of his sentiments.

Dr. Flower's house, indeed, was not on Washington Street at all, but on Center, a very different street. Center, however, had this merit, that it stood back to back with Washington, and as the Washington Street residences were mostly "detached" at this point, the rear of the Flower house commanded a certain view of that handsome thoroughfare; not much of it, of course, — an oblique slice cut in between houses. The distance, as has been said, was rather great for eyes less keen than the lynx's. But a pair of opera-glasses at the parted curtain discreetly bridged the space, and brought a few feet of the Street of the Rich under the legitimate observation of the less materially successful.

Now, when she had leveled her glasses upon the three figures — for Charles, at this trying moment, was escorting *two* ladies down the promenade — Miss Angela felt, to say truth, a little lonely and out of things. Not only was Mr. Garrott the first man she had met in the new city, but she had met him only, as it must now have seemed to her, like ships passing in the night. Not dreaming how she had been figuring in his thought, the girl felt, humanly and femininely, a little depressed. And when she presently reflected, "I suppose

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this is the time he goes down to lunch every day!" — the small thought was actually a cheering one to her, presenting, as it were, some point of contact with Washington Street and the pleasant happenings that seemed to go on over there.

Such, in fine, was the sheer enchantment of distance. To Mr. Garrott himself, this public promenade was as far from a pleasant happening as could well have been conceived.

When he had looked over the street just now, and seen who his old friend's companion was, Charles had, indeed, experienced a decided shock. On the heels of that, he had had a moment of distinct uncertainty. Ought he to cross and join this remarkable pair, or should he avert his eyes? The etiquette here was unknown to him, the business without precedent in his experience.

There was more than etiquette involved, of course. While this particular city was alive to contemporary currents, and even had its little Redmantle Club, it still considered the Church of England marriage service a sound start for a union, and associated contrary theories exclusively with inferior morals. To walk Washington Street with Miss Trevenna was, as it were, to wound and rebuke the city's old-fashioned prejudices. But that, without doubt, was the very reason Mary Wing was doing it.

Charles had crossed the street. Mary Wing saw him, half-way over. Not suspecting how his unfavorable scrutiny had been upon her for some time past, she smiled a bright welcome.

He was presented to Miss Trevenna. She acknowledged his greeting in an absent, fluty voice, and turned on him briefly a face of almost nun-like serenity, palely lit by a pair of starry eyes. He found her altogether a mystic-looking creature, not easily associated with things wild and gay.

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"I was just telling Flora about the Education Reform League," continued Mary, in her calm tones.

But Charles, after all, had no great chance that day to show his fearlessness of mere public opinion. Hardly had he passed out of Miss Angela Flower's range of vision, when the walk of three ended, if the episode did not. It was Miss Trevenna's corner, it seemed; she could not be persuaded to go farther.

"I'd turn with you, but I have a class," said Mary, disappointed, and a little surprised, it seemed. "I wish you'd stroll on with me!"

"I've something to do at my room — some business to attend to, really."

"Then let's walk this afternoon, do! Shall I come for you?"

"How nice of you! I'd like to so much."

On which the girl was gone, stepping on light feet down the side street. In the momentary lapse of talk, Charles's eye went after her. He saw something mysteriously withdrawn in that gray figure, something set forever apart.

And then, while he and his friend walked on six steps in silence, the young man wondered, with a sudden fierce annoyance, what Mary thought she was doing exactly.

Of Miss Trevenna he knew only what the world knew, which was little enough. One of several daughters of a prosperous family, she had been known as a reserved, and somewhat dreamy girl, indifferent to social life, and much addicted to curling up at home with books of poetry; Shelley's poetry or some such bewildering stuff; altogether a queer person. She even wrote poetry herself, it was damagingly alleged after the crash, and it was recalled that in women's meetings she had sometimes risen and expressed, in the quietest sort of way, ideas which disconcerted even the Hodgers of her day.



CHARLES HAD NO GREAT CHANCE TO SHOW HIS FEARLESSNESS OF PUBLIC OPINION

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Duly there had come to town the entirely typical dashing stranger: Robert McKittrick, this one was, an architect in government employ, who came with excellent letters. Mr. McKittrick was seen in public, a time or two, with Mr. Trevenna's quietly peculiar daughter; it was known that a sane and sound Mrs. McKittrick existed in Philadelphia, or some such place; there may have been a little mild talk, but it was very little and very mild. And then one fine day, the town was startled with the news that these two had taken the great jump together, by the last night mail train north.

It was the sort of thing you read about in every novel nowadays, especially if written by an Englishman. But this time, unluckily, it had really happened, and in a community not too large for a homogeneous public opinion. Moreover, life does differ just a little from the novels, in that it possesses no invisible author to shut the book splendidly, the moment the case is proved. Life did not leave Mr. McKittrick and Miss Trevenna forever singing in the honeymoon heyday. It merely kept them in the back of the town's mind for two years, a tidbit or a terrible warning, according as you looked at it, and then it brought Miss Trevenna back to us again, alone.

It might have seemed the oldest and the vulgarest story in the world. The weak, trusting maiden, the handsome, promissory villain, the flight, the rude awakening and Conviction of Sin, and then the piteous Return (Act III, Curtain) to Forgiveness, a black shawl, Quick Decline, and Death: these things have wrung the gallery's scalding tears from farther back than we can remember. But well Charles Garrott understood that Miss Trevenna's "case" had nothing to do with this cheap business. He thought it right enough, of course (theoretically speaking), that Mary Wing should sympathize with a sister in distress. And yet . . . Well, no one,

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unjust to her? On the contrary, I'd be delighted to fork over all those rights of hers she was demanding the other night. By the by, what are Hodger's rights exactly?"

"I suppose she's entitled to human rights, even if you, as a man, don't find her especially attractive."

Charles winced, and then smiled faintly.

"Human rights — security and protection, life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness? She's got them, has n't she? I thought what Hodger was yelling for was special privileges, rather exceptional privileges in the way of freeing her Ego from —"

"As a woman, she has n't even all the human rights, you know very well. As a human being, she would feel that she's entitled to exceptional rights, because she's an exceptional being. She would take the ground that her public work —"

"She would take that ground, of course. But," said Charles, amiably, "possibly others would not agree with her. That is just the trouble, is n't it? The doctrine that the world belongs to Exceptional People has that fatal weakness."

"In your opinion," she qualified him — "what?"

"We'd need a great board, a sort of Super-Supreme Court of really godlike understanding, to tell us which are the Exceptional People."

Seeing that he had her temporarily at a loss, Charles continued his agreeable prattle: —

"And hand them out their little certificates, you know. I remember, this chap Chesterton said a fairly bright thing once — a little piece I read somewhere. He said he'd always wanted to hear somebody — anybody — preach 'personal liberty' with one small qualification. Said he'd waited and waited to hear one person state the creed something like this: 'Men and women of genius must not be bound by ordinary laws. But I

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am NOT a man of genius, and therefore I will keep the law.' Chesterton said he'd been waiting for years."

He was aware that Miss Wing was regarding him in a curious sort of way, and now she said, directly: —

"Do you know, this does n't sound like you at all?"

"Does n't it? — why not? I've always believed in taking a good look around, every now and then. Constant discussion," said Charles, "constant canvassing of rival theories —"

"Well, those theories are only good for people who think that the way to advance is by standing still."

As she spoke these positive words, the two were overtaken and passed by Henry Mysinger, of all people. Mr. Mysinger was at once Mary's principal at the High School and her special adversary in the Schools, against whom in years past she and her friend Garrott had how often schemed and plotted. His salute now was pleasant, with reference to Charles, but the eye he cast upon his assistant was distinctly not approbatory.

As for Mary, it did not appear that she bowed at all.

"But the way to advance is by advancing," she continued, declining to lower her voice at all, "and it's only the exceptional people who are capable of superintending these advances. That, by the way," said the school teacher, "is probably the very definition you are looking for."

He flatly rejected her definition; disputation followed. With increasing pointedness, Mary Wing pressed the case for "exceptional people," Self-Developing People who recked not of Homes and being Sisters and Daughters. And presently she said, with only a small air of hesitation: —

"And please remember that enlightened people cannot possibly point the way without courage, and — a certain amount of pioneering experiment."

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Mr. Mysinger had mercifully withdrawn himself around the corner of Third Street. There his assistant would turn, too, parting from her friend; and really, that appeared to be just as well. Forgetting his mask, the young man was beginning to betray signs of exasperation. No more than Mysinger, of course, had he ever been deceived by the delicate girlishness of Mary's face; but the positions she seemed to be taking now passed anything he had ever thought of her addiction to the New. Was this mere argument for argument's sake? — or did she seriously imagine that the regeneration of society was to be accomplished by the antics of a few wild female Egoists — lawless Egoettes?

"That's true, to a point, of course," he said, with control. "Yet don't you suspect people who talk about their Duty to the Race, while overlooking entirely their duty to that part of the race which should be nearest and dearest to them?"

"I'd suspect even more people who dare n't call their souls their own, for fear they might be criticized by somebody who knows nothing about the facts."

And then she exclaimed suddenly: "Oh, why don't you say at once that you've been talking at poor Flora Trevenna for three blocks!"

He was considerably taken aback, but spoke calmly: "Not at all — or at least only in a general way. One of the problems of the day, as we say at the Redmantle Club."

It was on the tip of his tongue to say then, man to man, as it were: "Miss Mary, you have a great work ahead of you, in a special field. Is n't it a pity to confuse your good cause with one that perhaps is not so good?" But, of course, you hardly gave advice of that sort to Mary Wing.

"But since you seem to invite my opinion," he continued, "I will say that I do think there is a logical connection be-

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tween Hodger's kind of talk and Miss Trevenna's — ah — pioneering experiment."

"Of course there is! Who denied it?" said she, with a forthrightness that increased his wonder at her.

And then, as they came to a standstill at the corner, she added, after a grave speculative stare: —

"If it'll do you the slightest good, Mr. Garrott, I'll tell you exactly what finally decided Flora to forget her duty to her sisters, aunts, uncles, and so on, as you consider. Prepare yourself. It was a sentence in a book."

"A sentence in a book!"

Miss Wing nodded, several times. "As she's a reserved girl, and I appear to be her only friend now, of course this is a confidence."

"I can name the book!" cried Charles; and he did.

"However," he resumed, with bitter urbanity, "if she'd happened to read a few pages further, she might have noticed that the Lady in Sweden took every bit of it back."

To his surprise, Mary Wing laughed.

"Do you know, that's just what I told her, in almost those very words? And what do you suppose she said? 'Well, I'm glad I did n't read as far as that.'"

Continuing to look at him and continuing to laugh, the annoying young woman added: "I'm afraid you don't begin to understand women as yet, Mr. Garrott! No, you don't begin to. *Au revoir!*" *

It was noted that Charles's bow was characterized by a certain stiffness.

He went on his way alone, to Berringer's, and the good solid man-talk. The strongest thought in his mind now was that the end of these things was not yet. And here, at least, he was by no means deceived.

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The next day was Saturday. At two o'clock on that day, each week, Charles took train and went down to his mother's place in the country, there to remain till early Monday morning. This was an invasion of his writer's time, with which he let nothing interfere. Returning to town, and finding "Bond-women" not yet heard from, he became absorbed in a short story — for the "line" of his new novel could not be laid in a day or a week, of course — and went suddenly upon his emergency schedule, as Judge Blenso had named it. This schedule called for the omission of all exercise, other than as tutoring necessitated, and a general withdrawal from the world of living women. But he could n't get away from their Unrest, even so.

Late Thursday afternoon, as he was working out the last pages of the time-killing fiction, the door of the Studio opened without a knock, and Donald Manford walked in. Donald certainly continued to make himself very much at home here.

"Get out," said Charles, tired and cross. "What do you think this is, a Wheelman's Rest?"

The tall engineer said that he was passing and thought he'd drop in. But with the aid of an eyebrow he made known, over Judge Blenso's snowy head, that he desired private converse in the bedroom.

The public talk between the two young men, continuing, was that Donald wanted to borrow a white waistcoat from Charles, which Charles was rather reluctant to lend him. Thus, gradually, they faded from the Studio, much to the annoyance of the Judge, who had ceased typing on purpose to listen, while ostensibly merely engaged in picking lint from his types with a brass pin.

When the door of the bedroom was shut, Donald Manford said, in low hurried tones: —

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"Have you heard all this talk about Mary? I tell you the town's buzzing with it!"

Charles had heard no talk; he was disturbed, if scarcely surprised. But when it became clear that the purpose of Donald's visit was to get him, Charles, to "drop a hint to Mary," he refused at once, point-blank.

The engineer was pained and astonished.

"You don't understand the situation," said he, stewing. "I tell you Mary's gone to work to make a heroine of that woman! Recommending her for good jobs, with her morning, noon, and night, having people in to meet her at *tea*! Now, of course, she just does n't understand what she's doing. She's too innocent; she's ignorant of the practical meaning of this business. And it's my duty to protect her from her ignorance. . . ."

Charles sat down on one of the parallel white beds — the Judge's. And little as he sympathized with Miss Trevenna's Blow for Freedom, he seemed to sympathize even less with his young friend's proprietary absurdities.

Whatever this stalwart youth was, Mary Wing had made him. An orphan and poor, he had been taken to the bosom of the kindly Wings; and Mary, a girl of twenty then, had been from the start his second mother. She had fed and clothed Donald, helped pay his bills at college; she had trained him, taught him, filled him with her own ambition. She had got him his first opening, pulled wires for him, hewed out his ascending steps. Fine and confident as Donald stood there, Mary Wing had made him. And now to see him, as to her, clutching on the toga of the primitive male, to hear him, the ignorant, ridiculously claiming overlordship in a field which should have been supremely woman's. .

"Go ahead," said Charles dryly. "Protect her all you want."

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But Donald angrily told him not to be an ass. It was a delicate matter — for him — he declared; besides, Mary would n't listen to him. He was n't *advanced*.

"But you're another matter. You've got some influence with Mary, and —"

"Stop right there! I've got more influence with the Weather Department than I have with Mary Wing."

Glowering at him over the foot of the bed, the engineer demanded reasons for his strange unpractical behavior. Charles offered a few simple selections from his complex feelings.

"First, your cousin's personal behavior is none of my business. Second, I'd have no respect for her if she gave up her principles because you asked me to ask her to. Third, I despise a person who's scared out of his wits by fear of what the neighbors 'll think."

Donald appeared momentarily speechless. Perceiving this, the author fitted a cigarette into a holder Mary Wing had given him on his birthday, and resumed his few remarks: —

"Of course your mistake is in supposing that Miss Mary is acting through ignorance. She's acting from principle, as I say, and doing a plucky thing, too. For she does n't think that because a poor silly girl has once made a mistake, the thing to do —"

But Manford recovered his voice with a bound.

"*Mistake!* I'm surprised at you, Garrott! I did you the justice to think that all this advanced rot of yours was just talk. Come! — say right out you think it's a mighty plucky thing for a girl to go off and live with a married man!"

Charles smiled, and then hesitated. It was odd how instantly Donald Manford modernized him, killing all reactions: But what was the use of arguing with a fellow who honestly

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believed that a woman had but one "virtue," who spoke of her frankly as "the sex," allowed her no honor but "woman's honor," had but one question to ask about her "character"? This youth had not budged since the fifth century.

"The only way to punish this is by the disgrace of it, I tell you!" he was arguing. "There's no punishment at all when you make a heroine of the woman."

"There'll be enough to punish, don't fret, without Mary Wing's taking a hand."

"Now look here, Charlie," said Donald, encouraged. "Just look at the matter in a sensible way. You can feel sorry for her and all that. But it is n't right, by George, it is n't decent and moral, to stand up and practically say you admire a notorious bad woman! Just think of the effect on other women! They 'll argue, 'Well, if that's the way people feel about it, there's no use being good any more.' And think, Charlie! — what 'll become of Society if all the girls get to skipping off and living with married men!"

Charles laughed and rose. "Of course I'd not dream of speaking to Miss Mary about this."

The young engineer exploded. But presently he gave it up.

"Then I'll have to speak to her myself," he declared, and looked as if he expected the hazardous audacity of such an enterprise to touch his friend's heart, even then. "And you remember this," he added, angrily, "when Mary's friends are all dropping her!"

"Nobody who drops her for this was ever her friend."

"More New Thought! And what about Mysinger? Suppose your idea is that this plucky business will boost Mary's standing in the schools like the devil?"

"My dear fellow, you're seeing things! You never heard of

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politics, I suppose? Nothing can shake us in the schools. 'Cause why? We own the Board by two votes."

Donald regarded him with the strongest disapproval. "Do you know you make me sick?"

"By the way," said Charles, pleasantly, "did n't I see you go by here with Miss Flower the other day? Where did you —"

"Absolutely sick, and I've —"

"Meet up with her, old fellow? Is n't she a —"

"Sick!" roared Donald, and banged the door.

He was a hopeless ignoramus, and Charles was the peer of the greatest authorities, living or dead. But the subject, beyond doubt, was the most complex and baffling in the whole field of Womanology. And Charles, standing and staring at that shut door, was possessed with the odd feeling that Donald had got the best of the argument, after all.

Why must Mary *always* be as independent as the Declaration, and more militant than a Prussian?

V

THE emergency schedule withdrew Charles from the streets; he lunched in twenty minutes at Mrs. Herman's and spent the hour gained at his writing-table. With the completion of the short fiction, he resumed his walks to Berringer's. And now on Washington Street, the principal scene of his social life since he became a regular author, he saw again Miss Angela Flower. In five days, suddenly, he saw Miss Angela three times.

Twice, as it happened, the two passed on opposite sides of the street, moving in contrary directions. But the third time he fairly overtook her, not a dozen steps from the door of the rich little Deming boys, to whom he taught the Elements all morning.

He was pleased with the agreeable coincidence. He greeted Mary's so different cousin with a genuine warmth, springing spontaneously from his personal sense of a bond between them. And Miss Angela, it seemed, was not less glad to see him.

"You don't know how nice it is," she laughed, a tinge of color in her smooth cheeks, "to see a familiar face, after blocks and blocks of strangers. And you're almost the only person I know, too!"

Suiting his long stride to hers, he assured her that this state of affairs would pass quickly.

"I got only a glimpse of you yesterday," he pursued. "Do you take your constitutionals at this time, too?"

But she said, elusively, that she took them at all sorts of times.

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"It's my chief form of recreation at present, you see! But — I thought I might meet father up here — it's his time for coming home to lunch from the college. Only I seem just to miss him every day."

He and the Womanly Woman walked a good half-mile together that day, and the authority enjoyed himself thoroughly. It was in the course of this walk that he evolved another phrase of scientific justification, viz.: "The Business of Supplying Beauty and Supplying Charm."

The talk turned naturally upon the girl herself. Having failed to get any biography from the embattled Miss Wing, Charles proceeded to the source. Under his agreeable, yet artful promptings, Miss Angela sketched with a charming simplicity the story of a commonplace family life: how she and her brothers had grown up at Hunter's Run, a cross-roads post-office four miles from Mitchellton; how they had moved into Mitchellton, which had seemed like heaven at first, but had palled after seven years; how all the boys of Mitchellton grew up and went away, one by one, to make their marks in the world (though there was one exception, it seemed, a Mr. Dan Jenney, who was still in Mitchellton — Aha! thought Charles); how lonely she was after Tommy, her older brother, had thus gone away; how her father had had quite a large practice in Mitchellton, but did n't seem much interested in getting patients here; and so on. Tommy, it was learned, had married money in Pittsburg, but appeared to be happy all the same. As for the younger brother, Wallie, his ambition was to go to college and be an electro-chemist, and he was now at work downtown, gathering funds for that purpose. Mary Wing had got him a position, it seemed.

Miss Angela's conversation, as has been noted, was not remarkable as conversation. But what mattered that? Into

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an atmosphere too heated by the Trevennas of this Unrestful world, her girlish unsophistications blew like a primrose zephyr. Moreover, she had her moments, you may be sure; her vivacities as honest as wit. She said that Mitchellton was like a town in war-time.

"That's the way a man described it to me once, a surveyor from the North, when he'd only been there three hours! He declared he had n't seen a male between the ages of fifteen and sixty-five. They'd all gone off, you see —"

"And then the surveyor went off, too?"

"He did! — exactly! Hopped on a funny little calico pony he had, the minute he said that, and trotted off down Main Street. We never saw him again."

Charles, laughing, looked down at her. She wore a plain blue suit and a simple hat with a yellow quill, obviously inexpensive both, and not new. She was characterized, sartorially, only by that unobtrusive yet exquisite neatness whose practice some women bring to a fine art. Pretty and sweet she looked, none the less; feminine, too, without a doubt.

And, quite unconsciously, she was giving by piecemeal an answer to that fundamental question of her Modern critics, How do you spend your time? A considerable part of Miss Angela's time went, it seemed, to the actual care of the house. With her leisure she really had little to do as yet, because of her lack of acquaintance. Even the table of bridge with Cousin Mary had not developed so far. She walked a great deal, usually alone, but mentioned having met Mr. Manford the other day; the impression was left that she and Donald had n't specially taken to each other. She kept her mother company; she often went into the shops, "just looking"; once or twice she and Wallie had been to the moving-picture shows. She read also, it seemed, for she had just finished

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"Marna" — a gift to her, this was — a certain late New Woman novel which Charles himself meant to give an hour to some day. Her account of her domestic business the old-fashioned girl concluded thus: —

"I don't know very much about housekeeping yet, but I do the best I can. I think mother enjoys the rest."

And whatever criticism narrow utilitarians might have brought against her management of her fifteen hours a day seemed to be morally destroyed by that unconscious stroke. *Mother enjoys the rest.* Imagine Miss Hodger, for instance, — to come no nearer home, — casually mentioning: "I don't want to do this, but I will. I want to go there, but I won't." "Why, Miss Hodger?" you would ask her. "Why must you mutilate your Ego thus?" "Well," — you are to fancy Miss Hodger saying, — "you see, I think mother'd enjoy the rest!"

But the girl herself remained delightfully unconscious of the reactions she set in motion.

"Mr. Garrott," she said suddenly, — "I hope you don't mind my asking, but — when are you going to have some stories coming out? I'm crazy to read one of them!"

"Oh!" laughed Mr. Garrott. "Well! — I can't say definitely, at the moment. I'm trying," he said, modestly, "to write books, you know, and it's a slow business, with the little free time I have. My first one, that I've just finished, took me four years."

"Four years! How wonderful! But isn't it going to come out soon?"

"I'm — ah — negotiating with a publisher now."

"It must be fascinating! I — I never knew an author before."

He warmed, expanding.

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At the parting of their ways, these two paused, talking like old friends; and no parting took place here, after all. Angela said, with a charming hesitancy: "Mr. Garrott, if you really want to read that book, — 'Marna,' I mean, — I wish you'd let me lend it to you. We've finished with it — for good! — and if you have time to stop a minute — " And he, who never called, who had a special rule against borrowing things from ladies, restored his hat to his head at once, accepting with pleasure.

So they turned out of Washington Street toward Center, and she continued, with a laughing, sidelong glance: —

"Do you know who *Marna* reminded me of? Quite a friend of yours! — somebody you admire a great deal!"

Knowing the nature of the book well from the reviews he was incessantly reading, the young man smiled: "I wonder if you can possibly be alluding to one of your most distinguished cousins."

"It did, just a little! At first, I mean — where Marna goes away to lead her own life, and everything. . . . Mr. Garrott, do you think she's really going to take the position in New York, Cousin Mary, I mean?"

"Take it! Why, of course she will, provided she can get it! It would be a remarkable thing for such a young woman, and a great opportunity besides."

This the girl seemed to understand. She remarked, however, that Cousin Mary and Mrs. Wing seemed so wrapped up in each other. Her extreme domesticity was peculiarly refreshing to Charles just now; nevertheless, he now took up the cudgels for Modernity, though in the gentlest way: Why should not daughters have the same right to leave home for work that the sons of Mitchellton had, for example? Daughters had always left homes for another reason. Sup-

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pose *Marna* had married the first whippersnapper that came along, and he had carried her off to Australia, etc.

But Miss Angela seemed to feel that, for her part, she would look long at any lover who wished to separate her from her mother.

Center Street, at this point, was a place of car-tracks, cobblestones, and threatening small establishments of those personal sorts which are always first to appear in a waning "residence district." At the corner stood a Human Hair Goods Works. The Flower house was not intrinsically pretty. It was one of a block of six, all just alike and evidently built some time ago; rather dingy little brick houses, with weather-beaten small verandahs set only a step or two above the sidewalk, and scantily separated from it by grassless "lawns." However, Charles was not repelled by poverty, to which he had been well used.

Within, he had the pleasure of meeting Miss Angela's father, who was encountered in the hall, in the act of removing his overcoat. Angela left the two men together, while she tripped upstairs to get "*Marna*."

Charles found the medical father a decidedly queer individual. A very tall, thin, seedy man he was, with a neglected sandy mustache, and a long neck punctuated with a very large Adam's apple, which he jerked with a sort of nervous twitch as he talked. With his lusterless eye and spare, remote manner, he looked like a man who had let himself dry up from within. Yet, if Charles remembered aright, the Medical School had counted this gentleman a distinct acquisition.

He assured Dr. Flower that he had long desired this pleasure, and explained:—

"Your cousin, Miss Wing, is an old friend of mine."

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"My wife's cousin," said the Doctor, seeming to make a distinction. "Quite so! Certainly!"

"I believe it was she who first brought the Medical School to your attention?"

"Ah, yes! I fancy it was. Quite so. Have a cigar, will you? However," continued the father, jerking his long neck, "you don't offer that as something to be urged against her, I assume?"

The young man, though surprised, smiled politely.

"Possibly you're no more enthusiastic about teaching than I am, say?"

"Ah, well! . . . It wants excitement, you maintain? — lacks the spice of brilliant variety? You find no romance in it, you suggest? Well —"

Dr. Flower fell silent, brushing his hat with the sleeve of his worn coat, while he stared cheerlessly at nothing. Charles wondered at him, with a certain sense of mild mystery. If he felt that way about teaching, why had he thrown over his practice and left Mitchellton?

"I believe," said he, with discretion, "your — that is, Mrs. Flower's cousin, Mary Wing, is the only teacher I ever knew who could really be called a 'fan.'"

"Quite so. You won't have a cigar, you said? But even in that case, it doesn't amount to a complete exhaustion of the energies, you would feel? You'd contend there's an unused store for other enterprises, even there?"

"Quite so," said Charles, considerably puzzled.

But then Miss Angela came skipping and smiling down the narrow stairs, book in hand, and slipped her arm through her father's. She said that Mr. Garrott could keep "Marna" as long as he liked, but that she would be so interested to hear what he thought of it. The trio stood chatting a moment together.

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Angela's last word, in her soft and pretty voice, was, "Don't forget, we're going to have that bridge game some night soon!"

So he took leave of her, not only with the book, but with the promise of a party shortly to come. And, curiously, that was the first thing this simple Nice Girl had ever said that the authority felt inclined to criticize somewhat: the use of the word "that," now. Skilled and wary he had grown since he became a regular writer, and he could not recall having agreed to give a valuable evening to playing bridge soon. The engagement had just developed along, it seemed.

But that was a trivial matter, early lost sight of. Continuing his walk to Berringer's and the good man-talk, Charles pondered upon the nature of a Home.

La Femme, as we know, was all over for this young man; through too much knowledge he had analyzed the charm away. He did not (of course) exaggerate Miss Angela's values, magnify anything about her whatever. Of course she was but a Type, and a familiar one. Only, for him she had happened to personify, with unexpected freshness, that aspect of the Question which, he was more and more convinced, scientific thinkers fallaciously slurred over: the business aspect of Home-Making, to wit. Though few of the sounder authorities openly advocated the suppression of Homes, was it not true that they — and he once among them — practically did so by denying any value in their schemes to those emotional and spiritual contributions which alone turned a house into a Home? There lay the heart of the whole great problem. "Four walls," mused Charles, as he swung rapidly down Center Street, "and three meals a day, and even the banisters dusted, to boot — these mere utilities can never make a Home."

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And he made a mental note of the sentence for his conservative Notes in the exercise-book of the old lady.

But this day, as it fell out, was memorable in the Studio for more than meditation.

When he left Miss Chorister's at four-thirty, which was when the tutorial day ended, the author did not make straight for the Studio, according to habit, but turned downtown again, instead. He had personal affairs to attend to to-day, an accumulation of small shopping and sundry errands that could not be longer procrastinated. They took much valued time. It was after six, in the winter night, when he got home.

At the foot of his own steps he encountered his and his relative's new fellow-lodger, and their only one. Possibly he was still thinking scientifically of Miss Angela, for it instantly occurred to him that here was Miss Angela's full opposite.

"Oh, good-evening, Miss McGee!"

He spoke as pleasantly as possible, but the lodger only answered "Evening," and turned her back at once.

"How do you do to-night?"

"Tired as a dog."

"And no wonder, working such long hours!"

No answer from the lodger.

"You *are* later than usual this evening, are n't you?"

"Keep me on purpose," muttered Miss McGee angrily (or something like that), climbing the tall stairs.

She was a dark young woman, darkly dressed and darkly scowling, it had seemed, at the mere sight of Charles. As he knew from a rare letter on the hall table, her official name was Mary Maude McGee, but to him she was always and simply Two-Book McGee, on account of her apparent habit of reading two novels a night, every night in the year. She had them

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under her arm now, with the labels of the circulating library showing.

Charles also had a book under his arm, "Marna": here was a topic!

"Do you," he inquired, continuing the social chat, "find many good novels these days?"

"No, I don't!" said she, so sharply that you would have supposed he was to blame for it. Imagine!

"You must really look over my stock some day, Miss McGee. I'm sure I have *something* you could read."

But the invitation brought only a mutter from Miss McGee, and the door of the Second Hall Back banged shut behind her.

"Help! help!" mused Charles, and straightway was struck with an interesting thought: How about taking over Two-Book McGee as a minor character in the new novel?

He considered the idea, mounting to his Studio. The lodger was known as a self-supporting female, allied with a tintype and "art photography" establishment. Certainly she seemed an odd sort of person to say "Look pleasant" to anybody. Friends, engagements, pleasures, she had none, on the word of Mrs. Herman. All day she helped to photograph the General Public; all night, till sleep overcame her, she sat alone in her very small room, reading novel after novel which she did not like. A dull life, it might have seemed; but then, you see, she had, to bless her, the priceless knowledge that she was a self-respecting and independent being, a person and not a parasite. The authorities could not doubt that Two-Book McGee was happy in her way.

Charles, however, seemed to be doing just that, at the moment. He conceived Miss McGee as one not joyful in her economic freedom; hence as an "illustrative character" for

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conservatism, sowing doubts in the minds of readers as to whether *Leading My Own Life* was, in fact, necessarily the other name for happiness. Climbing the stairs now, he invented words for Two-Book's mouth: imagining her as saying, "Oh, I'd marry anybody to get out of this!" — and again, with sobs, crying out to some modern arguer, "Oh, just to be a parasite again! — just to be a snug, comfortable little parasite!" . . .

So making fiction, Charles Garrott opened the door of his Studio. And full upon the threshold, he encountered the great surprise of his life.

The large room looked familiar and inviting. The lamp burned on the writing-table; the drop-light shone over the Judge's typewriter; the author's office-coat hung on his chair-back. By the typewriter stood the Judge, pink and shining from his evening bath. Wrapped in a beautiful lavender robe, he turned, smiling.

But on the writing-table, beyond the lamp, there lay a strange package. The author's eye had fallen on it even as he opened the door. Some instinct in him seemed to divine the incredible truth instantly, but something else within spoke loud and sharp: —

"What's that?"

Judge Blenso laughed agreeably, and lowered the bath-towel with which he was rubbing his fine white head. To the secretary, the literary business was still a sealed book indeed; so far as he was advised, a package of manuscript back by express was doubtless a very pleasant little occurrence.

"Why, it's Entry 2, Charles!" he chuckled. Your novel — just come in! Must be! And gad, my dear fellow! Willcox wrote you a letter, too!"

The young man bounded for the table.

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Long as he had deemed himself a writer, Charles King Garrott had as yet sent out little manuscript, "Bondwomen" having absorbed all his creative energies for years. Accordingly, the prevalent stupidity of editors and publishers, amounting oftentimes to mere madhouse imbecility, as every young writer can testify, was yet as a sealed book to him. With the ultra-modern message of the Old Novel, he, personally, might have become authoritatively dissatisfied; but that any publisher in his senses could fail to jump at it had, of course, scarcely entered his mind.

Hence, in the two seconds required to pounce upon and open Willcoxes' letter, his mind was tossing out other explanations of that package with the utmost lucidity and vigor. Willcoxes had been so pleased with the Old Novel that they had put it in type at once: this package was the proof. The package was the manuscript; but it had been sent back by an office-boy by mistake, and the letter rushed after it to implore pardon. Willcoxes, while delighted with the novel, had thought that possibly some of the ultra-modernism had better be toned down a little, in the interest of Homes; therefore . . .

In short, Charles Garrott's mind executed exactly the processes that all young writers' minds execute at these moments, in instinctive recoil from the stupefying fact of Rejection. But when he got the letter open, all this activity was quickly stilled.

DEAR SIR [it ran]:

We have given careful consideration to the manuscript of the novel, BANDWOMEN, which you were good enough to submit, but regret to report that the decision has been adverse. We fear that the publication of the story would not prove a financial success.

The manuscript is returned to you to-day by express. Thanking you for giving us the opportunity of examining it, we are

Yours very truly,

WILLCOX BROTHERS COMPANY.

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In this stunning letter the stenographer's error seemed the crowning insult. *Bandwomen*! Charles, for once in his life, blew up.

The proceedings ensuing came as a complete surprise to the secretary, exciting in their way: he had really never thought that Charles had it in him. That commonly sedentary and controlled young man had abruptly become dynamic and vocal. Some of his remarks eluded the listener, as, for instance, the menacing cry: "I'll rent the Academy of Music some day to tell about this!" But on the whole Judge Blenso, who himself, in his prime, had been counted an accomplished commentator on the world's devilish ways, gladly gave tribute to Charles for verbal ingenuity and somewhat arresting vividness of metaphor.

But it was clear now to the secretary that this was no pleasant happening after all. When the storm began to abate, he spoke in mollifying tones: —

"Now, my dear fellow, — this unfortunate occurrence. Unfortunate! But as to that plan of mine — we might consider it now, Charles? What do you think?"

"What plan?" Charles said, in a let-down voice.

"I regret this, about Entry 2," said the Judge, with his brilliant black gaze. "'Bandwomen' is a fine novel, my dear fellow, — fine! But as to that little plan of mine — giving our undivided time and abilities henceforth to some more remunerative kind of work? Gad, Charles! — would n't it be wise?"

And then Charles, after staring blankly at his relative's odd handsome figure, suddenly burst out laughing. . . .

But later he stood at his window, staring silently down into the lamplit street. A rare depression had suddenly closed over him. Oddly enough, it seemed to have little to do with his

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great repulse as a writer. After all, "Bondwomen," good though he felt it to be, did not represent his best thought now; moreover, that the next publisher would jump at it still seemed to him as certain as Judgment Day. The young man's deep dissatisfactions were with all the terms and conditions of his writer's life.

Long ago he had said to a friend once, "I can't afford to give my time to making money," and the remark, being repeated, had gained him the reputation of a fool's wit, none recognizing that he had practically bagged it outright from a fellow of the name of Agassiz. And there (he was thinking) was the measure of the degree to which he had withdrawn from the accepted ways of men, from all the currents of stimulating life. Making money, after all, was the "battle of life," and he — he had thought it often before now — had placed himself with the noncombatants. All day, downtown there, vigorous beings met and fought, crossed wills, locked minds, pitted strength against strength; while he, Charles, spent his days with women and children and his nights alone in this room, palely pondering over ethical subtleties. He remembered something Mary Wing had said to him one day last winter: "You're a great deal more like a woman than a man; don't you know it?" On the whole, Mary had meant that as a compliment, but the word had stuck in him like a knife.

He had bent his life to be a writer — and for what? Merely that those who knew him best might view him, tolerantly, as a member of the Third Sex.

"A writer ought to go out once a month and do something cruel," he thought moodily. "Assault and battery. . . . Blood in rivers. . . ."

He was disgusted with tutoring and writing, with Woman and all womanish ways.

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Nevertheless, the instant supper was over, he was found seated at his writing-table, "Notes on Women" open before him. In fact, the bee had stung this young man deep, whether he liked it or not. In sum, the unimagined rebuff to his principal *opus* did not diminish, but intensified the literary passion. Now he embarked upon his first attempt to plot out a definite scenario for his new novel, "Bondwomen's" subtle and superior successor. And it must have been that the novel thoughts generated at the Redmantle Club had rapidly crystallized through the days succeeding. For now it seemed to be quite clear in the author's mind that he would take, as the central figure in his greater work, an extreme specimen of lawless Egoette, against whom he would set, in subtle but most telling contrast, the best type of Home-Maker.

VI

IT was one of those slack hours in the domestic day when even the most tireless hands can find no task to do. Miss Angela Flower sat by the single window of her bedroom, the window that gave, over two sets of back-yards, a sectional view of Washington Street. On the ledge beside her stood the opera-glasses, employed sometimes for long-distance vision. They were old glasses, somewhat shabby now, and the case to them was long since lost.

To be transplanted is hard on the young, as Charles Garrott had once said, and to be a normal girl is to desire that pleasant happenings shall occur. This was Angela's favorite seat in the house, because it brought her nearest to the happenings of the Street of the Blessed: nearest to them, while she was yet farthest away. Often in the early weeks she had, indeed, felt quite forlorn as she sat here; she was a stranger and friendless, of a poor family and with small opportunity. Since the Redmantle Club meeting, however, the view from the window had become more personally interesting, more touched with the sense of participation. Here Angela had seen Mr. Garrott on his way to lunch; here she had twice glimpsed Mr. Manford, striding along from his office just at dark; here she had even made out Mr. Tilletts, whom once she had mistaken for somebody's uncle, whirling by in a great automobile.

And this afternoon, in her leisure hour, Angela did not feel forlorn or out of things at all, nor did she so much as glance out of the window, with a naked eye. She had sheets of note-

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paper upon a magazine in her lap, and on one of the sheets she was writing blithely: —

Miss Angela Flower entertained at bridge Thursday evening.

As the Redmantle Club had been her first party in the city, so the young girl, with real pleasure, now planned for a second, this one to be her very own. It had occurred to her, more for fun than anything else, to write out a little notice of her party for the social columns of the "Post." Not being as experienced at writing as Mr. Garrott, she took some time to get the wording of the notice just to her liking; but it was a very happy sort of time.

That finished, Angela turned again to the more practical aspects of the party. Who were to be the guests at it, in fine? As yet she had only herself and Mr. Garrott.

Now, calling out suddenly to her mother in the front room, she learned to her surprise that it was almost half-past four o'clock; whereon she sprang up at once, and began to dress quickly for the street. About quarter of five, after talking a little with her mother in the front room, Angela set out to call on her cousin, Mary Wing.

Now Angela knew that something rather unpleasant was going on in connection with her Cousin Mary at this time. Being a well-brought-up young girl, she was, of course, not allowed to hear bold, improper talk, but still she knew that there was *something*. Mrs. Flower, though very fond of Mrs. Wing, who was her double first-cousin, had, indeed, felt obliged to forbid Angela to cultivate any undue intimacy with Mary; which Angela, considering the differences between the two girls, was hardly likely to do in any case. Nevertheless, relations were still pleasant, and Mrs. Flower had agreed that, under the circumstances, Cousin Mary and Mr. Manford

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should be invited to the bridge-party. It was the cousinly thing to do, and besides, as Mrs. Flower had pointed out, she could not very well invite Mr. Manford without inviting Cousin Mary, too.

The Wings lived in a pleasant house on Olive Street, four doors from Washington and overlooking the Green Park. The house was bigger than it looked, because of a two-story extension that ran out behind, converting an ordinary dwelling into two quite nice flats. Building that extension was the very first thing that Mary had done when she took charge of the family. In the upper flat dwelt Mr. and Mrs. Crowther, who could sometimes be heard recriminating each other in embittered tones. In the lower flat Mrs. and Miss Wing were very comfortable, with four rooms, bath, kitchenette, tiny back yard and patent clothes-dryer. The fourth room, which had been Donald Manford's till he outgrew apron-strings, was a convertible affair, now a dining-room, now a bedroom, according as the Wings dined at home, on the one hand, or were receiving a visit from Fanny Warder — Mary's younger but married sister — on the other. At present the latter condition prevailed, and Fanny's two babies possessed the room, the flat, and the world besides.

Angela entered upon three generations, scattered widely over the sitting-room floor. Fanny was out, but her place in the line was ably taken by Aunt Mary, whose modernity did not stick out so much in these purely domestic moments. Angela, watching her cousin explain to Paulie Warder why the best little boys never, *never* ate green paint, thought with a kind of surprise: "She really looks very nice." She was duly presented to Paulie and Neddy-Weddy, who were coaxed to show off their store of tricks for the Pretty Lady, and she did her best to shower those eulogies which the relatives in the

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case invariably expect. But Neddy-Weddy, for his part, appeared altogether too sleepy to care what strangers might think of him, and it may be that to a coolly impartial eye Paulie appeared more soiled than cute at this particular moment. Angela really was n't sorry when the babies' grandmother gathered them and their belongings to her bosom and withdrew to an inner chamber.

But when she broached the matter of the bridge-party on Thursday, Cousin Mary said at once: —

"My dear, it's very sweet of you, but I could n't — possibly. I can't dream of taking an evening off — oh, this side of Christmas!"

Cousin Mary had a great stack of examination papers to mark, it seemed; she pointed to them on her open desk in the corner. She also had ten thousand leaflets to distribute for that Education League of hers; they lay in bales in another corner, behind the sofa. Further, she had three articles to write at once for the League's magazine: for it had a special magazine all its own, it seemed. As for Donald Manford, she said she could not speak. But Cousin Mary did mention, in a discouraging way, that Donald also was doing a good deal of rush-work just now, clearing his desk for his trip to Wyoming.

"And besides, my dear," she concluded, "to the best of my knowledge, Donald can't play bridge at all."

"I could teach him, Cousin Mary — it's awfully easy! I remember, I taught a man in Mitchellton to play once, in twenty minutes! Besides — why, of course, it would n't make any difference!"

Mary Wing, no doubt, desired to play fair. She could not say now, as of old, that Donald never went out; for she knew that Donald was going out that very evening, escorting Miss Helen Carson to the theater, in short. Mary knew this,

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because she had arranged the matter herself, and personally bought the tickets for Donald's account.

So she said: "You must ask him, Angela — do! Use my telephone there, why don't you, and catch him now before he leaves the office?"

But no, that was just what Angela felt she could not do, for, while she had enjoyed two short walks with Mr. Manford, the truth was that he had never called. Mr. Garrott, on the other hand, besides everything else, had called, the day she lent him the book.

"I thought *you* might ask him, Cousin Mary. I thought you might just bring him with you, informally. It's going to be very informal," said Angela.

"But as I can't go myself, Angela, you see . . ."

Angela concealed her disappointment as best she could. She was a sweet-natured girl; moreover, Cousin Mary, after all, was the only person who had tried to do anything for her. Nevertheless, her disappointment was keen, and touched with a little irritation at Cousin Mary's attitude. Her cousin, Mr. Garrott, Mr. Manford, and herself — they made a natural table of bridge, a little coterie of friends and relatives who instinctively met together now and then for congenial diversion. It did seem rather hard that Cousin Mary should spoil it all, with this firm stand against all social enjoyment. Only she and Mr. Garrott, it seemed, cared for a little wholesome pleasure.

And undoubtedly this attitude of Cousin Mary's did reduce the bridge-party to a rather precarious position. Of course Jennie Finchman could be secured for the other girl, or even Fanny Warder; but as for the man to fill Mr. Manford's place, that was a more difficult matter.

"I'm awfully sorry *you* can't come, Cousin Mary," she was

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saying in her soft voice. "Mr. Garrott'll be *so* disappointed. He admires you so much — indeed, he does! He told me so only yesterday."

"Oh!" said Mary Wing; and added, as if it were a part of the same sentence — "yesterday! You're seeing a good deal of him now?"

"Oh, yes! We have a walk or something nearly every day."

"He's quite attractive, don't you think?"

The girl answered without self-consciousness: "Oh, I do — he's the nicest thing! And so cunning-looking, too! — is n't he?"

"I've always been intrigued, I admit," said the school-teacher, "by the three brown freckles on his nose."

She was looking with admiration at her cousin's fresh youthfulness, so unmarked by experience, so innocent of knowledge of fierce conflicting ideas. And Mary looked with a kind of compunction, too. She had honestly wished and tried to "do something" for Angela; but, alas, she herself had been so long and completely out of things that few connections remained to her now, such as would assist to launch a somewhat belated début. She had her hands full enough trying to do something of that sort with Donald, an eligible man. Still —

"Oh, Angela, here's a thought!" she said, suddenly. "If you'll only make a decently long visit, you'll be almost certain to see Donald here! He drops in nearly every afternoon to see the babies, you know —"

"Oh! — does he?"

"You never imagined such a goose as he is over them. And then you could ask him to the party, in — in a casual way."

Angela cheered up at once. Of course, if she could meet and ask Mr. Manford in a casual way, it would be different. And it must be admitted that Mr. Tillets, who had hovered

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in the background of her mind, did seem a rather remote possibility.

So the talk passed easily from the bridge-party to Fanny Warder, and other lesser matters.

Mary Wing moved about as she talked. She was picking up fire-engines and pieces of cake, overlooked by the grandmother in the suddenness of departure. Angela's eyes followed her over the room, and she felt a touch of envy. It was really a pretty room, much prettier than anything in the Flowers' little house, large, light, attractively furnished, most comfortable and livable. But, of course, it was a simple matter to have pretty things if you had the money to buy them; which, in brief, was just what the Flowers did n't have. It suddenly came over Angela that her advanced cousin was, comparatively speaking, a *rich* woman.

She said something of the sort aloud presently. Mary Wing replied that she worked pretty hard for all she had.

"Our furniture is so old and awful I can't do a thing with it," continued Angela. "I rub and scrub and polish, but it just seems to get worse. And then the parlor is that long, narrow shape, like a sleeping-car, and needs papering so dreadfully! You know, Cousin Mary," said the girl, with a rueful laugh, "we were never so poor in all our lives! You don't know how hard it is to accomplish *anything*, when you literally have n't a cent to spend."

Cousin Mary, who could be very nice when she wanted to, expressed herself very sympathetically. "And I do know something about it, my dear, you see, for I've been that way myself."

"If father'd only get some patients!" said Angela. "But he's so funny, he just seems to think a family gets along somehow, and never even put up his sign till I begged him to!

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And, of course, Wallie does n't contribute anything; he just puts away everything he makes for his education —"

"It *is* hard on you, poor dear —"

"He has to, of course. But I *have* wished we had Tommy back, these weeks since we've been here! He was the sweetest, most generous thing, till he married. . . ."

But soon Cousin Mary gave the conversation a characteristic twist, with the very suggestion that Mr. Garrott had once promised to make to Angela, and then permanently backed down.

"Angela," she said, suddenly thoughtful, "did you ever think at all of going to work — regularly, for yourself?"

The girl looked up, in surprise. "Going to work? You mean in an office?"

"Yes — something of that sort. You —"

"Why, no, Cousin Mary! I've never *had* to think of that. Of course, father can still support me. I did n't mean you to think —"

"Oh, of *course*! I understand that perfectly! I meant only on your own account, my dear, so that you could have your own money, all you want of it. It makes a difference, as I can testify! And then, too, I know a good many girls with plenty of money already, who go to work — well, just for the fun of it! — Helen Carson, for instance."

Angela looked as if she hardly knew how to explain herself to one holding her cousin's known ideas of fun. However, she endeavored, sweetly.

"Yes, I know. But in the first place, you see, I could n't very well be spared from the house. I do every bit of the work, except cooking and washing, and mother does n't expect ever to touch the housekeeping any more. It takes so much time, and worry, and our cook is *awful*, because we can't afford to

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pay but twelve dollars a month, and, of course, a good servant won't work for that! And besides, father would n't dream of allowing such a thing, Cousin Mary. He'd think it was — was just charging him with being a failure, and not able to take care of his family!"

It was a sufficiently conclusive statement, as Cousin Mary seemed to feel; she did not argue back, but replied understandingly, and mentioned that Harold Warder felt the same way about women's working. So Angela felt the moment to be favorable for explaining her deeper points of view.

"And, Cousin Mary, even if I made mother take back the housework, and father'd let me do it," she said, with a girlish hesitancy that became her well, "I would n't *want* to go into an office — or have a business career. I — just feel differently about all those things. I have no ambitions that way — at *all*!"

Cousin Mary, who chanced to be standing near, surprised her by stooping suddenly and pinching her cheek.

"Tell me what your ambitions are, Angela, dear."

"Well — you probably — I don't believe you'd understand exactly what I —"

"On the contrary, for two cents I'll tell you what they are myself."

"Well, what?" said Angela, gazing up with unfeigned interest. "Tell me what you think?"

"They really can be stated as one, my guess is," said Mary, smiling in the nicest way: "To be a good wife to the man you will love some day."

Color flowed suddenly into the girl's upturned face. By a strange coincidence, Cousin Mary had stated the ambition in the very words Angela herself would have used. But, though maidenly embarrassed, she would not lower her gaze as if she

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were ashamed of her ambition, or overborne by her cousin's hard masculinity.

"I know," she said, pink and sweet, "you think that's just a — weak womanly ambition! I know you are n't much interested in my kind of things, Cousin Mary."

"Indeed, you wrong me," said Mary, her smile dying. "I don't feel that way at all."

And through her shot the irrelevant thought: "Why does she call me Cousin Mary, all the time? I'm only four years older than she."

But, as the two girls thus gazed at each other, the interval in their ages seemed, indeed, indefinite and immense. Angela's eyes could afford that subtle expression of known womanly advantage. The light of afternoon, flowing freely over the park and into the long windows, fell full upon Mary Wing's delicate face. It was a face, to be just, not devoid of a feminine attractiveness at times. But now the bright day showed it colorless and tired; the marks of many "fights" lingered indefinitely about the mouth; tiny crow's-feet netted the corners of the fine blue eyes. Yes, this school-teacher's first youth was gone. Full of strange isms, she had lost sight of the real things of life, and now her Woman's Opportunity had slipped away from her forever.

It may be that Mary Wing would have given something of her honors to be prettier than Angela just for that moment.

"I think it would be hard to name a finer ambition. To be a good wife to . . ." And, breaking off, she added, with another smile, sudden and merry: "To Dan Jenney, did n't you tell me?"

Her young cousin lost her dreamy look rather abruptly.

"Why, *no*, Cousin Mary! Please don't say that! I only told you that —"

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But Cousin Mary, having turned her eyes toward the window, interrupted the womanly talk with a smashing announcement.

"Here's Flora Trevenna coming in — good!" she said in her most matter-of-fact way. "Excuse me a minute, Angela, — I'm bell-hop, you know!"

Angela, who at least knew the ill-omened name, gave one startled gaze, and sprang up. The prospect of casually meeting Mr. Manford was forgotten in her sudden panic alarm.

"I must *go!*" she said, looking about her a little wildly. "I — should have gone some time ago — really! I just stopped in to —"

Mary's colorless face seemed to stiffen a little. So, perhaps, Mr. Mysinger was wont to see it.

"Well, wait just a minute," she ordered, rather than requested. "I'd especially like you to meet Flora."

Nice reward this for being cousinly and inviting Cousin Mary to the bridge-party: *to meet that woman!*

"I — really, I *can't*, Cousin Mary! I'll just run back and see your mother a minute — and then —"

"You can't well be so rude as that, can you?" said Mary. And then she added, as if something within her threw out the words beyond her will: "Why do you call me Cousin Mary all the time? I'm only four years older than you."

The question, of course, expected no notice. Mary was gone into the hall. Yet Angela, left unpoliced, did not immediately fly toward the bedroom region, or run and hide with the leaflets behind the sofa. It may be she feared her hard cousin a little; but besides that, in the strangest and most contradictory sort of way, it appeared that she did not altogether want to fly. She was conscious of an excitement, of a sort of unworthy curiosity.

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The front door opened; there were voices. And then Mary Wing returned, her arm slipped brazenly through that of her astounding friend.

And Angela, despite all of the injunctions of propriety, looked; looked, with a sort of fearful fascination. Never in her life before, to her knowledge, had her girlish eyes rested upon a Badwoman. Though virtue went out of her, she *must* look this once. . . .

"Flora, this is my cousin, Angela Flower, whom you know of, I believe. My friend, Miss Trevenna, Angela."

A look of greeting came upon the Badwoman's not displeasing face, a little smile upon the pretty, sinful lips.

"Oh, how do you do, Miss Flower?"

But Angela, with her upbringing, found it impossible to reciprocate these friendly overtures. Take one shameful peep, she might. But that itself brought a reaction, perhaps; and as well as Donald Manford, as well as Judge Blenso himself, Angela knew, if only by intuition, that good people must stand up for morals. Donald certainly would have applauded her, as she inclined her graceful head about an inch and spoke two cold words: —

"Miss Trevenna."

And then, her alarm mysteriously gone, she turned to her cousin and said, formally: "Good-bye, then, Cousin Mary. Do come to see us when you find time."

Indeed, the two cousins viewed everything too differently to make much intimacy between them probable. When the door had shut on Angela, Cousin Mary put her arm about the shoulder of the Badwoman and said the strangest, the most advanced thing possible: —

"Dear Flora! You must let me say — I'm sorry."

Miss Trevenna, with her deceptively cloistral countenance,

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seemed to flinch a little. Her gaze looked rather bright; it fell away from Mary's. But she produced a fair effect of uncomprehension and surprise.

"Sorry? Why, what for?"

"Well — I can't feel my little cousin showed to very good advantage."

"Oh, did n't she? But it makes no difference. I — hardly ever notice what people do — really! Are you too busy, or shall we walk?"

"Let me get my hat," said Mary.

Having put on hat and coat in her own bedroom, the fighting educator looked into the room beyond, where the babies and their grandmother were considerably spread over creation.

"Angela gone?" asked Mrs. Wing presently, in the midst of cooing.

"Yes," said Mary; and let it stand at that.

"Look how he cuddles in his granny's arm. I had to change his little socks again. She was very strange with them, Mary, did n't you think so?"

"Strange? — how do you mean?"

"Why, she just did n't seem to care anything about them! Did n't you notice, she hardly looked at Paulie once! How could she help loving such little darlings? And she seems such a nice, womanly girl, too."

"Well, *all* women are n't maternal, mother, don't you know that?"

"In my day," said Mrs. Wing imperturbably, "all good women loved babies."

But when Mary said where she was off to now, a shadow fell on her mother's calm face, and Mary saw it. However, Mrs. Wing said nothing, this time.

Though Donald had never carried out that hare-brained

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threat of his, as to "dropping a hint" to Mary, his voice could scarcely have been missed amid the general feminine chorus. Indeed, everybody who possessed so much as a hint to her name, in those days, seemed to be dropping it to Mary. How far she minded her public unpopularity Mary did not say, but her mother's unwavering disapprobation she unquestionably took to heart. "Good women don't make mistakes of that sort," said Mrs. Wing, and was shaken by no argument. And now, as Mary bent to kiss this wrinkled and well-loved cheek, she was thinking that never in the world before had there opened such a gulf between two generations; and she wondered why life must be so hard.

Later, Mrs. Wing sat for some time quite still, by her window, and her brooding look was not grandmotherly now, but motherly, which is different. For, of course, there was one person on earth to whom Mary could never seem truly the mature, advanced and dangerous young woman of Fights, Reforms and Careers. Through all her newnesses and strength, the mother's eyes yet held her as the tiny, helpless, clinging little scrap which she, a young girl then, had gone down to the gates of the world to bring in.

VII

THE "line" of the new novel refused to come straight on the first attempt, or the second, and Charles had been compelled to leave his preliminary scenarios to ripen gradually in his head. In the intervals of intense plotting, he was tossing off short fictions; four such he had now tossed since the completion of "Bondwomen" had set him free. "Bondwomen" itself was in the hands of that discriminating house, Messrs. Blank and Finney, Judge Blenso having risen up early on the morning after the rejection to take it to the express office. Experience was now coming with a leap; but yesterday the first of Charles's new stories had been sent back by "Willcox's Monthly," with a mere printed form of refusal. This was the fiction about Dionysius, who, it may be remembered, had freed his eyes from the magic of sex and consequently cracked walnuts with a sort of splendid sadness.

Such episodes staggered belief; but, in a strange way, they seemed to fan the fires of genius unrecognized. Hence it was without joy that Charles confronted after supper this evening a memorandum he had lately left for himself in the place where he left memoranda. It was brief, containing but a single word, — *Bridge*; and, coming on it unexpectedly, the author spoke but a single word, though a different one. No more than Mary Wing, of course, did he have evenings to fling this way and that, in mere idle frivolity. Why did people have this mania for playing cards, going to places, calling, all the time? Why the mad rage for doing things?

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As to this engagement, it seemed just to have developed along; the first he knew of it, you might say, the thing was settled and arranged. Still, it was admitted that from the young Home-Maker's point of view, it was all quite simple and natural and human. Charles, even in the first flush of author's revolt, really felt no bitterness.

Shutting his table drawer with a bang, he withdrew to the bedroom and began to assume one of those garments which first brought renown to Tuxedo Park.

Charles's acquaintance with Miss Angela had developed smoothly, without any unusual effort on his part. That they had a walk or something every day was not mathematically accurate; but he had seen the girl several times since the day of the call, when he got the book. The very next day, as it fell out, he had met the pretty cousin again on the promenade, at about the same time and place, and as she was out only for exercise, and had done her stint, she said, she very charmingly turned around with him. In no sense was it repellent to the authority thus to see, by pleasing signs, that the old-fashioned girl liked him, in the good old-fashioned way. At the same time, of course, he was, by deliberate choice, a fiction-writer, not a dancing-man; and his position about the bridge-party, as he saw it, was that he was doing a kindly deed, to give pleasure to a rather lonely young girl. Moreover, it should not occur again.

And when he set out on the brisk walk to the Flowers', he was not thinking of Angela at all, but of Angela's cousin, Mary. He understood that Mary was to be at the bridge-party — indeed, he understood that the party was being given principally in Mary's honor — and he was genuinely concerned as to what his manner toward that young woman now should be.

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His perplexity dated from an episode two days earlier. On Tuesday afternoon he had met Mary Wing over by the High School, not entirely by chance, and had turned and walked with her. She was alone, for a wonder; but she had begun at once to talk of the unhappy Miss Trevenna, fairly bursting out as to the way she was being persecuted, and so forth. Miss Trevenna had "lost" two places already, it seemed. And Charles, seeing how much to heart Mary took the luckless girl's troubles, suddenly felt sorry for her — yes, he ventured to feel sorry for Mary Wing! — and did what he had positively resolved not to do. He, also, dropped a hint to Mary.

The memory of that unwisdom was with him yet, as an exasperation and a hurt.

It had profited him nothing that he approached the task, circumspectly, in his light, humorous vein. "Did you ever hear what Susan B. Anthony said when she had tried using bloomers for a year?" he had inquired, positively jovial. "Said she was convinced that one reform at a time was all that one person could manage!" But Mary Wing had said instantly, "You apply this to me," and right there had the trouble begun. "Are n't you crippling yourself needlessly?" he had amiably suggested. "Is it wise to feed the popular delusion that any sort of reformer is all sorts of an anarchist?" To which she replied, quite indignantly, "This is n't a question of *reform* at all with me! — if you must have it explained to you." And when he asked her what she expected to accomplish exactly, she declared that in point of fact a great deal had been accomplished already; Miss Trevenna's father had seen her, for one thing, and it seemed but a matter of time before she would be forgiven and taken back. "But if nothing was accomplished in a thousand years," said Mary, "I'd still do exactly what I am doing!"

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The worst of it was that one large disunited side of Charles stuck it out that Mary was doing exactly right: he knew, indeed, whatever she might say for argument, that all this was chiefly a matter of her sympathies, and she no more believed in this sort of Freedom than he did. Hence his counter-argument had not been up to his best standard, a mere urging of timid prudences, it seemed. And very soon she had swooped on his weakness, silencing him at a stroke:—

“I’ll not drop an old friend just because it’s *safer*! I’ll not. Mr. Garrott, you disappoint me.”

Now, no man on earth enjoys being told that he has disappointed a friend, least of all a woman friend, in a matter involving courage. Mr. Garrott held that word ungracious from Mary. And now, as he strode silently toward his evening of pleasure, he seemed to feel that there was, indeed, a kind of hardness in her, and, as to him, a certain air of assured superiority such as could not be further tolerated.

How, then, should he deport himself toward Mary now, seeing her again at the bridge-party? Through long blocks, Charles pondered the question. While leaning from the first toward a manner of brilliant tolerance, slightly aloof, indeed, yet splendidly witty, he really had not settled the point finally in his mind, when Miss Angela opened her front door for him, and said, almost in the first breath:—

“Oh, Mr. Garrott, what do you think? Cousin Mary and Mr. Manford both backed out! *I hope you don’t mind playing three-hand!*”

Taken completely by surprise, the young man hardly repressed a bitter mirth.

But that, after all, was for his wasted evening only. And in a moment he was himself again, doing his deed of kindness, distributing pleasure among the young and lonesome.

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He was not, indeed, he considered, one to think the less of a girl for being poor but hospitable, for desiring to "entertain," when, the too obvious fact was, she had nobody to entertain. The three-hand's party rather touched than repelled Charles; he criticized not Angela, but Mary Wing, who had stayed away. Moreover, the other guest turned out to be Fanny Warder, which suited him unexpectedly well. Grieved though he was by Fanny's broken beauty, she had become a Case to him now, one more exhibit in the growing gallery of Woman's Unrest.

And certainly, when it was all over, it never once occurred to Charles to think of this evening as a waste, exactly.

Into the mysteries of three-hand, as pursued in the Flower parlor that evening, it will do well not to follow. The play really was not the thing, as Angela had implied to her Cousin Mary, when speaking of Donald. Fanny Warder played a poor game; everybody said that. Of course, she had only come to help out, but still, one could not avoid observing how treacherous were her bids, or crying out upon her when she was discovered slumbering with the three highest hearts. A great deal of jumping up and changing seats there was, a great deal of discussion each time as to which one had better jump and change, constant demands of, "Whose bid is it?" and, "Who dealt these cards?" But there was much girlish laughter, too; merry prattle flowed unceasingly; "a good time was had."

And Angela's bridge-party had, as Charles viewed it, one sterling merit: it ended early. It is a point which, as is well known, rests entirely in the hands of the hostess, according to when she elects to bring on her refreshments; and when Angela rose soon after ten o'clock and tripped away alone to get "the party," as she called it, the author's whole opinion of

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her went up at a bound. He had known women, thus having you at their mercy, to keep you sitting around till midnight before ever mentioning "the party," and then sometimes those horrible jolly girls made you romp back to the pantry and help.

And when, after a considerable interval, Miss Angela returned, bearing her refreshments on a large tin tray, the young authority again took the large view, sympathetically seeing the general behind the particular. The refreshments consisted of lettuce and tomato salad, together with crackers, a little cheese, ice-water, and a small box of candy. Charles could not conceal from himself that the salad was poor, the dressing had "run," the crackers were without crackle, the candy cheap, the ice-water warm; but, in a subtle sort of way, all this made him feel not less, but more, friendly toward his simple young hostess. Not knowing that she could not make mayonnaise, or suspecting that her little brother had reluctantly stood treat to the candy, his fancy pictured the girl as preparing the modest spread for her (two) friends with her own hands and thought, her heart full of pleasant anticipations the while. And this seemed normal and human to Charles, and sweet enough, and just a little pathetic besides. Angela, gayly setting out her three plates, was again a type and a symbol. She was all the poor Nice Girls in the world, ten million poor Nice Girls scattered over the earth that night who, the day's justifying labors done, were trying to create a little joy for themselves and others, sweetly pursuing their great business of Supplying Beauty and Supplying Charm. . . .

But while Angela was still in the rearward regions, making ready her tray, Charles engaged in a scientific talk with his old friend Fanny. It both interested and depressed him.

Mary's young sister had taken Harold Warder out of a

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field unusually large for these lean days. Harold had been in love with her from his knickerbocker days, and was considered to be "doing very well"; the match had been a most promising one. But ill-luck had pursued the young couple from the first, assuming the worst of all forms, unceasing doctor's bills. Fanny, beyond any counting, had had long illnesses following the births of both her children; and the expenses of the first one had swamped Warder, wiping out at once the rainy-day margin he had married on. That Mary Wing secretly sent money to Fanny, Charles was morally certain. But Fanny was well again now, and poverty and debt were wont to be the butts of young love. Why, then, was her pretty face drawn to a birdlike thinness; why this beaten look in eyes that were once so gay?

Tête-à-tête over the three-hand table, Mrs. Warder surprised Charles by saying that she wanted to go back to work; her husband, however, would not hear of such a thing. Charles, though a modern, said naturally not.

"I can earn a hundred a month," said Fanny, "and get a perfect nurse for twenty-five."

He explained the error in her utilitarianism. Intently shuffling the cards on the table, he pointed out the injustice of orphaning Paulie and Neddy-Weddy of their mother-love. Fanny's own mind seemed greatly unsettled. But she could be as straightforward as Mary with those she was fond of.

"Harold supposed," she said, presently, "that he was marrying a lively young person, one that he, at least, would find indefinitely entertaining. He discovers instead that he's got an ailing woman on his hands, one with no spirits or looks at all worth mentioning. Could you blame him if he woke up some day and said, 'I've been cheated?'"

And the Young Wife slowly added: "It'll be years before

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he gets his head above water again. And that's my doing, Charles, — I, who'd have cut off my right arm to help him the least bit."

Charles scolded her roundly for her morbidness. "Great heavens! — you must know *he* could never think that way! Look how you have helped him! If your health went, you gave it to him — let him hold that to his heart! There's Paulie and the baby, that you brought him, more than compensating —"

But Mary's sister broke this argument with her old laugh.

"Don't tempt me, Charles! I'm all kinds of a hypocrite but that kind! Of course, I wanted children a great deal more than Harold, and they're my compensation — for everything — not his at all. You know all that perfectly well. No, no," said Fanny, lowering her voice as Angela's returning steps were heard. "If Harold ever tires of me, I'll go, you may be sure. He won't find me clamping on his shoulders, claiming to be taken care of for life because of my two little darlings. . . ."

Charles had expected to walk home with Fanny, continuing the sad but interesting talk, but he was frustrated in that intention by the arrival of an escort of Fanny's own. This proved to be none other than Mr. Tilletts.

It developed that the seeking widower, who was known as a sort of public Former Suitor, had called on Fanny this evening, and, finding her about to go out, had begged the privilege of squiring her to and fro. Had Angela understood this in advance, how willingly would she have raised Three-Hand to a Table! But at least she could do her best now to remove from Mr. Tilletts's mind the idea that she was rude, — derived at the Redmantle Club, where she had made her unfortunate mistake, — and apparently she was successful,

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for Charles heard the plump seeker say, "May I call?" quite distinctly, as they moved into the hall.

The door shut on a chorus of good-nights.

The bridge-party was over; and it was only quarter of eleven. Charles turned toward the hat-rack and the Studio. And in turning, he surprised a look in his hostess's dark eyes, which seemed to say, in the most ingenuous way: "At last, a few minutes to ourselves!"

All evening, he had been aware of a subtly more personal note in Miss Angela's manner; a coy and engagingly proprietary note, which he, with his known dispassionateness toward this sex, considered as intended for Fanny Warder's benefit. Charles had not been annoyed by this: few men repel the adoration of a pretty girl. And now this soft simple expectancy of hers, this girlish lingering over her somewhat pathetic party, seemed beyond his kind heart (as he would have put it) to disappoint. "You're not going! — it's so early!" she exclaimed, and coquetted prettily enough: "I'd think you were displeased with me — promising to have Cousin Mary for you, and then not doing it! . . . But you don't mind *very* much, do you?"

Kindly Charles capitulated at once. "Pay my party-call right now —?" he threw out, gallant and yet thrifty withal. "If you're sure I'm not keeping you up. . . ."

So these two reëntered Miss Angela's little parlor, with its sleeping-car shape and too prominent Latrobe heater: a room poor enough in itself, but having an institutional significance when considered as the Waiting Room of the Womanly Woman. Here they sat down, side by side, upon a dented sofa. And here, before a great while, there took place a somewhat strange occurrence.

There began an animated flow of girlish chatter.

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"I have n't seen you on Washington Street for three days now, Mr. Garrott. I believe you're avoiding me! I met Mr. Manford this afternoon, and what do you think he said? That he could n't play bridge as well as he could build them, and was afraid he'd be mobbed at a party! I don't think he *could* play any worse than Fanny, do you? But Mr. Garrott, why does he want to go to *Wyoming*? I'd *lots* rather go to New York, if I were a man! I asked him if that river out there he was going to dam was pretty, and he said he'd send me a picture post-card of it, when he went. But I suppose he'll forget all about it. . . ."

Mr. Garrott, pleasantly relaxed, made suitable replies as need arose. In his scientific way, he was noting how fine and clear Miss Angela's skin was, what shining soft eyes she had, how soothing and sweet was her voice. Certainly this girl did not try to create the air that she was your manly superior, or address you like a Self-Made Man reproving his wife.

"Fanny's broken so dreadfully, has n't she? She was so lovely and attractive as a girl. Tommy was crazy about her when she visited us in Mitchellton, a long time ago. He gave her the loveliest presents! But Tommy was always the most generous boy. They were getting up a drinking-fountain as a memorial to Major Beesom — he was postmaster for years and years, you know — and Tommy headed the list with twenty-five dollars, and he was only making forty a month! I just wish you could have known Major Beesom! I know you'd want to put him in a book. Mr. Garrott, I'm *so* anxious to read some of your stories! What are your heroines like, generally?"

Out of which, she said presently, laughing and whisking her hand behind her back: —

"You were looking at my ring!"

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"Why not?" said Mr. Garrott, starting a little. "A cat may look at a ring."

That was reasonable surely. Angela, after a few teasing pretenses, held up her modest gimcrack for him to see. And Charles, naturally, accepted the hand so presented.

As to what subsequently occurred, there was always a divided house within the many-sided Charles. But all his sides insisted that, at this point, he had no interest in the matter whatever; some held that he had not even seen the ring till she called attention to it. Now, bending over the hand, he examined it, and said: —

"Well! This is news to me, you know!"

"Not at all!" laughed the owner of the ring. "Why, what do you mean?"

"I've seen an engagement ring once before, you see."

"You're very clever! But — does it have to follow that I'm engaged?"

"That was the rule, in my day."

"You don't seem at all curious!"

"I'm very curious."

"Well, I'm not, of course!"

"I'm glad to hear it."

He made, as it were, a sort of sketch of a move to release the small hand at this point. However, nothing seemed to come of it.

"Are you? . . . Why?"

"Oh, because — it's rather sad for an old bystander like me to see all the nice young people going off two by two, for happiness and the great adventure."

To that, the girl made no reply. She merely gave a little laugh, and withdrew her hand. The house seemed very still. And Charles was at once aware that he had been found some-

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how deficient at the simple game of parlor conversation. In a scarcely definable way, he felt himself rebuked for timidity, wariness.

Nevertheless, in her simple, natural way, the girl made known that the ring was properly the possession of a man in Mitchellton — Charles recalled Mr. Jenney — and was now worn only by courtesy, reminiscently, as it were, with no obligations attached.

"You see, his brothers all went off, like all the other men, and his sister married and went away, and so he said he would stay in Mitchellton with his mother. And it's truly the most hopeless place! He does n't seem to have any ambition at all — it provoked me so! I think all men ought to have ambition, don't you?"

"I do, indeed. And he owns that pretty ring, you say?"

"Yes. You see," she said, laughing and coloring, "when I felt I must break it off, — well, he would n't let it stay off exactly! I — I'm telling you all my secrets! He said he'd still consider himself — oh — you know!"

"Naturally. He had enough ambition for that."

And, as if to show Miss Angela that, in point of fact, none knew better than he how to talk to a girl on a sofa, Charles carelessly took up that betrothal hand again, saying: "So he made you keep the ring all the same?"

"The day we left Mitchellton. And I said I'd wear it — oh, just till I met somebody I liked better! It was really more of a joke! . . ."

"Ah! And you have n't met such a person yet, I gather?"

"Oh — I'm not to send it back till I know —"

"How long," said the young authority, at once completely

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conscious of the supreme inanity of the proceedings, and finding them enjoyable enough, "how long do you allow yourself to find out?"

"That is n't easy to tell. . . . Do you know you're the strangest man!"

"Am I? How do I seem so strange to you?"

The little hand was warm, not unpleasant to retain. The eyes, gazing up at him, were liquid and bright; they were woman's eyes. "Consider me," they seemed to say. "Am I not sweet, desirable? Am I not worthy to be held dear? Was I not made to delight? See, I am Woman, beside you. . . ."

"Oh," said the soft voice, "the way you do. Cousin Mary says you're the new sort of man, that is n't interested in girls at all. You're too clever to care anything about them. Are you?"

"Clever? I'd call that the stupidest thing in the world."

"Then you do like them! I'm so glad. I've wondered, you see. . . ."

The feminine speeches, the appeal of these eyes, seemed all at once to create an enveloping pressure, softer than nothing, yet extraordinary. Or possibly the trouble was that Dionysius, after all, had freed his eyes of the magic more brilliantly than his creator.

"What sort of girls do you like? Tell me?" said the voice of Woman, nearer.

And then in the suddenest way conceivable there took place the Strange Occurrence referred to. Without the smallest premeditation, Charles bent and touched his lips to that smooth invitational cheek.

On that central point there is not the slightest room for doubt. Let there be no wriggling or evasion here. Charles Garrott, who scorned *La Femme* and viewed Woman ex-



"OH! . . . WHY DO YOU DO THIS?"

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clusively as a Movement, did bend his neck and kiss the Mitchellton Home-Maker upon a sofa.

He meant the salute, he was afterward certain, as but a fatherly tribute to youth and beauty, or (considered in another way) but the expected, and in a sense purely conventional, move in the ancient parlor-game. But on such a move as this homes have been broken, families set to mutual slaughter, thrones shaken, history changed. Charles, to put it in a word, found it easier to begin paying his tributes than gracefully to desist from them.

Prompted by a not unnatural curiosity, the lady (who had not proved more than maidenly surprised or rebuking) said:—

“Oh! . . . Why do you do this?”

Who knows what trusting heart first voiced that immemorial question? Charles Garrott, at least, was not the first gentleman on earth to fail to utter promptly the one satisfactory commentary on his behavior. Miss Angela made that little, gentle note of interrogation which cannot be written, and then she said again:—

“Tell me—why do you?”

Then it was as if the intrinsic pointedness of that query penetrated the man, suddenly and sharply. It was the mere force of iteration, no doubt; but all at once the soft voice seemed possessed of a certain insistence, tinctured with a certain definite expectation, you might say. Now that Charles stopped to think of it, why was he doing this?

The young man's arms fell, as if something had burned them. He rose abruptly and strode away to the mantelpiece, where, however, the Latrobe heater spoiled any hope of an effective pose.

If he meant thus to signify that the little episode was closed and done with, life, unluckily, was not quite so simple as that.

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The pretty Home-Maker, having gazed at his back- or side-view a moment, as if bewildered, said in an uncertain voice:—

“I — I don’t understand you at all. Why did you do that?”

Putting down the impulse to bolt, and the even more astonishing impulse to return to that fatal sofa, Charles Garrott braced himself to reply. In this effort he was handicapped by emotions altogether unknown to most young men who sit upon sofas. For example: What would the lady in Sweden have to say to this little affair?

He confronted a fact which he had temporarily lost sight of: that he who pays these tributes must pay for them to the full. Half of him might feel resentful and furious, but it was clear that the whole of him, the net Charles, must cut a sorry figure for a while. Half of him might be crying out, stern as science itself: “Come, girl, be honest! Don’t go about dropping matches into gunpowder, and then pretend to be surprised at the explosion.” But the net Charles, brightly flushed, was speaking lamely as a schoolboy:—

“Well! Do you think I could be *blamed* — exactly? It — it seemed such an awfully natural thing to do. You — ah — it seemed I — I could n’t do anything *else*! . . .”

“I see,” said the girl slowly.

“Ah — you — you’re a very kissable person, you must know — ”

“And do you always go about kissing people you think are kissable?”

The young man shrank as from a blow. Not looking once in her direction, he did not note that she had spoken with a quivering lip. With a great effort at lightness, he stammered:—

“Well, hardly! It must be that I don’t often meet people who — who are as k-k-kissable as you — ”

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"I suppose I ought to feel flattered."

There was a miserable silence.

"I was mistaken in you," continued the Nice Girl's stricken voice. "I — I trusted you. I supposed you were too honorable — I did n't think —"

That word seemed to touch him to the quick. He spoke with desperate stiffness.

"I *am* honorable, I hope. Miss Flower — are n't you taking this too — too seriously, perhaps? After all, you —"

She astonished him by bursting into tears.

And all modernity became as nothing then, and Charles was simple man, horrified by the sight of woman's grief. Now his abasement became complete; now he groveled most properly; never, he vowed, would he cease to censure himself most severely for this Occurrence. He wheedled, he implored, he cajoled. But, of course, all this but made the matter worse, threw his wary, inexcusable omissions into sharper and sharper relief. And presently Miss Angela referred to him as *brutal* (did she not pause even after that, in a sort of expectant way?) and then ended the tragedy by begging him to leave *her*, her fatally ringed hands held fast before her eyes.

No such conclusion to the evening of wholesome pleasure could have been devised by the wit of fiction-writers. Charles gathered up his hat and coat like a thief, and let himself gently out into the night.

VIII

HE turned in at the Green Park, in the still night, and stood gazing with bitterness at a dim gigantic Citizen, who rose in bronze at the intersection of two walkways. The Citizen gazed back with no bitterness at all; but then, he was dead.

Charles Garrott, being very much alive, was thinking cadlike thoughts with clarity and vigor. In the romances, men who won a maiden's sweet kiss instantly besought her to name the day; failing that, they were cads. But Charles was resolved to fail that, and he was struggling determinedly not to feel a cad. He simply did not consider that Miss Angela's kiss had such a pricelessness, entailing cosmic responsibilities. Why was her kiss any sweeter than his own, to come right down to it?

Now pure remorse had faded: self-interest, outraged self-respect, fought to have their say. Indeed, Miss Angela herself could not well feel more mortified over those unimagined salutes than he, the New Man, did. And it was as if his humiliation had destroyed all that restraining sense of a bond here, and the brutal Charles was free now for a frank facing of his new reactions.

"Well, I won't marry her! I won't," said he to the calm Citizen. "I'll call myself names for her, yes; I'll send her bonbons—flowers—that sort of thing. I'll land Donald for her—that's a thought! I'll get her invited to the Thursday German. But *marry her!* . . . No, the kindest thing would be never to see her again."



"WELL, I WON'T MARRY HER! I WON'T!"

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And, gazing up in the silent darkness of the park, the unheroic young man began to think how he could go to Berringer's by the Center Street cars, and take his walks henceforth in the manufacturing district, and in far countrysides.

Between Miss Flower's and the park, Charles had been briefly unnerved by a disruptive thought. This girl loved him. Recollections from his salad days rushed on him, memories of swift violent fancies women took to him. He was cursed, it seemed, with a fatal fascination. Women might be practically engaged to other men; they might be at the altar's hinges; but he could not stroll among them with his devilish gift without scattering ruin amid the troths. If he was not openly rude to them, they took it as direct encouragement; if he was civil, from him they viewed it as wooing; and when actually crowned with the deliberate kiss . . .

But these bachelor terrors he had exploded with one "Piffle!" spoken so loudly that two young street-car conductors, passing to or from a car-barn, no doubt, nudged and jeered. Oh, no, Miss Angela was not in love with him. She had merely conceived that he, Charles, was in love with her. (A stinging thought this, even while it vastly reassured.) Yes, this rudimentary country cousin, whom he had felt sorry for because of her loneliness, whom he had been interested in purely as a Type (he maintained), with which to cudgel the hard utilitarian egoism of another sort of woman — this little creature must needs suppose that he, Charles Garrott, who knew the most attractive women there were, had fallen a victim to her village arts and bucolic wiles.

Great heavens! — Oh, the cheek! Oh, the naïve complacence of the naïvest sex the Lord ever made! . . .

Why, he had never paid the smallest attention to this girl; never taken dog's notice of her, you might say! Booting

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pebbles this way and that in the darkness, the angry young man reviewed the circumstances with scientific dispassionateness (as he considered). Compulsorily introduced by the firm Mary, he had spoken politely to the girl; kindly presented a suitable young friend or two; and therewith considered that the whole matter was closed. But no, on the contrary; one pleasant smile from him, and the Womanly Woman was up and doing.

She had pumped out of him the hour at which he took his walks (he knew nothing about the opera-glasses as yet); and straightway she began waylaying him on the street, nothing less. She had all but forced a book on him, which he would have to return with a "call" — she supposed; when he did not call, she did something which could only be described as inveigling him to her home (that was his word now), by the shallow ruse of a bridge-party; and then and there she had (you might say) flung both arms about his neck and kissed him. And by these proceedings, it appeared to her, in that queer world where Nice Girls lived, that she had affixed a claim upon him, fairly bagged his heart, in short. "Why do you do this?" said she, insisently. Oh, how simple life looked to such as these, her and her sisters of the Naïve Sex! Forever putting that stereotyped query, forever expecting to elicit the hoarse but extremely welcome reply, "Because I love you so!" No conquest too extraordinary to seem at all surprising to their quaint little self-approval!

There was humor now in his imagining of the Womanly Woman as quietly waiting at home to be wooed. It appeared that Miss Angela had done everything but that.

A church clock boomed suddenly: it was half-past eleven. The young man's eyes fell from the face of the Citizen. Through the stark stems of the winter trees a yellow light

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glowed strongly in a lower window. That was Olive Street there; this light shone in the Wings' house. He noted it absently, wondering why Mary worked so late to-night. On the heels of that came another wonder, more personal: What would Mary think of these proceedings upon a sofa?

There must have been a bracing quality in the thought of Mary Wing, for Charles's hot desire to justify himself chilled instantly. Mary had her faults, heaven knew; but she had nothing to do with sofas. In a wink, the young man became staggered at himself. For there was nothing he had been thinking just now that he had not seen clearly for many years past. What, then? Had his vision of late been blurred in the cheapest way conceivable? When he told himself that he was scientifically commending the supplying of Beauty and Charm, was it possible that he, Charles Garrott, had been subtly allured by *La Femme*?

From outraged and resentful, Charles became let down and depressed. Standing and gazing at Mary Wing's bright light, he found his whole point of view shifting. He, of course, was blameworthy, not this soft bit of unthinking femininity. Turned out without a lesson and with but one way of life — what could she do but signify, like her mothers, that she was ready to twine about her oak? So again, Charles saw the girl he had left in tears as a being mysteriously wistful and pathetic. And still she was a type to him, still a symbol of myriads of girls, waiting over the world: Girls brought up by simple parents who assumed that life was still as simple as they; girls made to stake their whole lives on the vague expectation that, because they are girls, some man or other will be sure to want them some day; a million girls waiting, day by day and year by year, while all they have to offer life fades away under their eyes. . . .

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The young authority trailed out of the park feeling much like the cads of Romance, after all. And yet it seemed to be settled now, definitely and positively, that he would not make a Womanly Woman the heroine of his new novel.

A light snow had begun to fall. Other people than Charles Garrott moved homeward from evenings of beauty, charm and pleasure. Motor-cars rolled on Washington Street. Emerging from the Green Park, Charles moodily saluted two young men who stood there on a corner; one was his good friend, Talbott Maxon, but the author passed him almost like a stranger. To all intercourse with his kind he felt utterly averse. Nevertheless, when he passed the door of the Bellevue Club, presently, he found his privacy ruthlessly invaded.

Down the wide steps between the two columnar lights — exactly as on that other evening when it had all begun — came shambling the loose figure of Uncle Oliver Wing. Only now Uncle Oliver's large face was faintly flushed, his large felt hat was pulled over his eyes, his very large cigar was rakishly uptilted toward the heavens. From which it was concluded that Mr. Wing was not less than five drinks and five dollars the better for *his* little card-party at the Club.

"Let's see now, Charlie, — what was it you asked me?" said Mr. Wing, catching stride and slipping his arm through the silent young man's. "Did I believe in this Woman's Movement, was n't that it?"

Resenting the intrusion, Charles replied coldly: "That was it, I believe."

Mr. Wing appeared no whit abashed. "Well, Charlie, fact is I believe in most any kind of a movement, as I reckon you know, and all I ask about any of 'em is, where's the harm of moving kind of slow, and taking a few good squints around as we go. That'd about give my view that you asked me for,"

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said the money-lender, a known reactionary in theory and practice — "Move slow and squint."

Genially, he took a fresh grip on the arm Charles had almost detached, and therewith went off into an ill-timed long rigmarole. So convivially windy was Mr. Wing that he had talked steadily through two blocks before it came over Charles, with force, that Mary's uncle had had a sharp aim from the beginning.

"Now, you take, for instance, this privilege of work they're all clamoring for, Charlie. Women must n't be parasites; give us the privilege of work, they say. And that's right, too; give 'em all they'll take's my view. But, Charlie, my observation is that when a woman clamors that way, it's ten to one she's thinking of work like being governor, or a great public speaker maybe, or Miss Jane Addams, out to Hull House there. But if you ask *me*, are they willing to work like men do, just so's not to have you call 'em parasites — well, that's where I say, let's stop and squint around. Of course, now, whenever you see a rich man's daughter refusing to touch her daddy's money, and jumping up mornings by an alarm-clock to catch the 7.42, and when you see her working nine hours a day, winter and summer, at a job it makes her sick to look at, for ten little dollars a week, and no brass band or fireworks anywhere — why, then you got a right to say, *that* woman hates being a parasite. But, Charlie, you're so quiet, you don't say anything, I don't guess you're following while I try to answer that question you asked me."

"Oh, I follow you," replied Charles, with annoyance.

Mr. Wing shot one keen glance at the young man's face, and another ahead as if to measure the distance yet remaining to his domicile.

"Well, now, morals, Charlie!" he continued, most agree-

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ably. "Lor', the things our little gals do say nowadays! Make you laugh right out loud. Ain't it funny how innocent women can keep, now? Up and take their cocktails, yes, and smoke their cigarettes, and talk right out, white slave this, and red-light that, and all the time—no more *notion!* . . . Why, Charlie, you would n't believe the pretty-faced little gal, no more'n twenty-two years old, I heard making a public speech once, and what do you think her subject was? 'My plea,' says she, 'is a single standard of morality for men and women. Whatever man may do,' says she, 'that we claim woman's right to do also.'"

The old gasbag broke off to say, "How-do, Ed," to a passer in the filtering snow, knocked the ashes from his cigar with the large hand that was not clutching Charles, and resumed.

"Well, Charlie, I'd been sitting there meek as peaches while that little gal explained to us all about men and women, but when she gets that off, and right away asks if anybody in the audience has got any questions, seemed like I could n't sit still any longer. 'Excuse me,' I says, standing up, 'but d' ye make a plea for the single standard of physical courage also, miss?' I says. 'What say?' she sings out, pretending not to hear me, while she tries to think what it said in that book she'd been reading. 'It's a little thing, miss,' I says, 'only an old fellow's way of saying if maybe Godalmighty did n't figure a little variety'd be a good thing in this hard world he gave us. When the ship goes down,' I says, 'do you call on your sisters for the single standard of courage, miss, or do you hold by the men's rule of the sea and the land, and hop into the lifeboats with the kids? Excuse a plain old fellow from speakin' up this way, miss,' I says, 'but seems to me maybe Godalmighty might have known what he was doing when he

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gave women more feeling, and men more fighting strength; when he appointed women to give life and men to guard it; when, as you might put it, he appointed some virtues for both to hold in common, and then some for each of 'em to grow and cultivate specially. And maybe, miss,' I says, 'Godalmighty made the distribution fairer than some of our college gals realize.' Well, Charlie, you ought to have heard the hand the crowd gave me, though there was some hiss'n' by Suffragettes, I own. And what d'ye think that cute-lookin' little thing does? 'I deny,' she sings out, her voice shaking, 'that God gave more strength to men. I deny there is a God,' she says. And right there she bu'sts out crying, and runs off the stage. . . . Yes, she did! — first speech in public maybe. Well, Charlie, all I say is, that's the kind of loose talk our gals're hearing all the time nowadays. And that," said Mr. Wing, coming to a halt before his own steps, and glancing hastily over his shoulder toward his door — "that's why I can't help feeling sorry for this little gal here that got into the trouble, and taking sides with her, too, against my public duty and morals. Why, Charlie, *she* thought all the talk was meant, not seeing it was only half-foolin', like in a play."

Now it was that Charles Garrott's bored eye upon Uncle Oliver suddenly became fixed.

"Taking sides with her?" he said, speaking for almost the first time in the walk. "What do you mean?"

"Well, that's just what I did, the effect was," said Mr. Wing, his own eye wandering, "and against my conscience, too. Why, Charlie, if I was n't an early retiree by habit, and this snow comin' on, too, I could show you quick enough where all this Single Standard was damfoolishness — unless, of course, you mean Perfect Purity, like I preach myself.

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And when a woman jumps up and hits a crack at marriage, that the rest of us are sacrificin' ourselves to build up for the good of Society, why, she's a bad woman, you can talk till you're black in the face, that had ought to be punished. Yes, and those that help her, they're lending encouragement to the enemies of the Republic, seems like, and they'd ought to be punished, too. But, shucks," said Mr. Wing, crushing the fire from the cigar against the iron railing, and putting the stump carefully in his pocket, "blood's thicker'n water, like they say. And I don't regret voting the way I did, though the majority was against me from the start."

The two men stood fronting each other in the silent street, and the young man's face had become rigid. And he was now perfectly aware of the faint gleam in the old man's eye, a gleam of distinctly malicious enjoyment.

"Mr. Wing, what are you talking about?"

"Why, I thought you must have heard, Charlie, you seemed so kind of glum. Why, I thought you must be on your way from Mary's now."

He glanced again at his door, as if to say that he really must not be expected to stop for further conversation at this late hour. And then he said what exploded Miss Angela Flower off the horizon.

"Why, Charlie, you see the School Board fired Mary this afternoon. On account of this little friend of hers, Trevenna, that she —"

"WHAT?"

"Well, transferred's really the word, Charlie," said Uncle Oliver, edging up a step or two. "She's sent over as a teacher to Lee Grammar School, reporting Monday. Johnson Geddie's the new assistant principal at the High School, commencing Monday, too. Well, Charlie, good —"

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Charles seized the burly arm in a grip sufficiently strong for a writer, and threw all his turmoil into three words: "*Who went over?*"

"Creamer and Honeykamp, I guess you mean. Of course, there was right smart feelin' aroused, and it seemed Creamer's got a growin' daughter in the High School, that's got to be protected and all. 'T was only Mary's good record saved her being dropped entirely, I guess, considering how Mysinger'd worked the case up against her. Well, *good-night*, Charlie."

Wrenching away his arm, Mr. Wing rolled rapidly up the steps and vanished into the dark cave of his hall. But Charles stood still as a snow-man on the sidewalk, feeling as if the skies had fallen.

IX

SO Mary Wing's name flared in newspaper headlines once again.

In matters of school politics, the editorial writers of the city were habitually gun-shy, but it was noted next morning that the reporters had treated Mary with marked consideration. "Of all the changes and new appointments ordered by the Board in its three-hour session," wrote the kindly youth on the "Post," "none created such amazement as the demotion of Miss Wing, she having for long been conceded to be possibly the most valued teacher in the city school system. Members of the Board, however, refused to explain their totally unlooked-for action, Chairman Garcin merely claiming that 'All changes were for the good of the schools.' Charges of politics were freely heard in the lobby, and one well-known citizen, who prefers not to be quoted at just this juncture, said," etc.

Reporters, as everybody knows, must severely repress their personal opinions and stick like mucilage to the bare facts. But which facts are the bare ones? Judicious selection is a wonderful thing.

However, one of Miss Wing's admirers read the "Post's" amiable sentences with no abatement of his burning indignation. Print made the thing immensely concrete, and that was all. In Charles's mind, every hard or critical thought of Mary had fallen instantly in the face of her astonishing disaster; "I told you so" was not in him. That his old friend's struggle upward had collapsed in sudden disgrace: this was bare fact

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enough to possess him completely throughout the tutorial day. Here fell a Modern principle from which he had never wavered, the great principle that a woman should have a fair field to work, and fair judgment, without prejudice of sex. All Mary Wing's success had been entwined with that principle; since she was in her teens, she had fought for it, in sunshine and in thunder; and in that town at least the way was smother for all women henceforward, because of what she had done. And now to break her, after all these years, only because she, a woman, had refused to throw a stone at a mistaken sister . . . By Heavens, this could not be endured.

Thus Charles communed with himself, crisply teaching the Elements, French and Sociology. And he snapped his watch at Miss Grace Chorister five minutes ahead of time and, writing forgotten, went rushing to the support of his "demoted" friend.

But he did not rush by way of the frequented promenade. As he had gone to lunch by street-car to-day, so his journey to the High School was conducted in the same discreet manner. Through all this unimagined disturbance about Mary, the young man had not lost sight of his last night's resolve, formed in the Green Park, as to Mary's so different cousin. Could he might be; understand it she might not (in view of the kiss); but Charles was clear that it was for the best that he and Miss Angela should meet upon Washington Street no more.

The "Post's" story had made one thing certain at least: Mary did not mean to tear up her teacher's certificate and pitch it, with her resignation, in the faces of the School Board. In the still watches, Charles had thought she might be capable of just such reckless repartee; now he divined that she was reserving her resignation, to discharge it, like a bomb, upon her expected election as Secretary of the Education Reform

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League. That prospect in the Career blurred the situation considerably, without doubt. Still, the secretaryship was three months away, at the worst. And meanwhile the immediate problem thundered for attention, namely, how to get Mary back into the High School at the earliest possible moment? Charles, who as a man considered this problem his own no less than Mary's, arrived at the School with three promising plans in his head.

It was Friday, commonly a late day for Mary, but you could count on nothing on such a day as this. However, when he had dashed into the great building and up the two tall stairways, there sat the late assistant principal in her little office, hard at work before a regular man's desk. She was discovered deep in the sorting of papers, and swung around at his step with a start and a smile.

"Good-afternoon! — and excuse the mess, please! The notice to move caught me a little unawares, you see. — Don't look so solemn, please!"

Whatever emotions she might have wrestled with last night, when her light shone so bright over the park, it was clear that Mary Wing had put them all down to front the world to-day. Neither did she seem embarrassed by any memories of recent conversations on these topics, of hints dropped and too firmly repulsed. Her manner, her sensitive fine face, were as composed as ever.

It may be that this, at the outset, was slightly upsetting to Charles, who was himself not composed at all.

He scooped a pile of "The New School" from a chair and sat with an elbow upon the writing-leaf of her masculine desk. Dumping papers from pigeonholes, Mary calmly explained how complete was her overthrow. Senff, who was known as Mysinger's "personal representative" on the Board, had pre-

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ferred the charges, she said, recommending her outright dismissal from the schools. The train had been carefully laid; it appeared that Mary had received an official warning from the Superintendent — an obliging man, elderly and weak, whom Mysinger meant to succeed before long — all of two weeks ago. Beyond influence and politicking, much weight was attached to the simple fact that Mysinger, as Mary's immediate associate and superior, felt this persistent antipathy toward her. All the same, the Board had debated the case a full hour.

"Dangerous ideas," she summarized. "I'm not a suitable person to have authority over the education of — young women and men."

"What they said about Socrates, too —"

"Yes, but I don't want a monument after I'm dead!"

She laughed, without self-consciousness, and said: "Oh, if I'd tried, of course, I could n't have put a better club into Mr. Mysinger's hands. Ideas! — I'm really amazed I was n't electrocuted on the spot. Of course it is n't as if I were a man, you see, with a right to have ideas. That's my real fault, from the beginning — at least with Mysinger. I'm a woman, and so should never have been suffered 'to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.' Dear St. Paul!"

It was rare to find bitterness in Mary. Charles asked hastily if there had been much talk about the building to-day. She said that the School had been buzzing with it.

"It's almost been worth having it happen, to see how many friends I've got. And the children are the best, of course. All afternoon my boys and girls have been streaming in here, in threes and fours — just to say they're sorry I'm going. . . ."

A shadow fell on her oddly fragile-looking face, and the author struck the writing-leaf with a large fist.

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"By George, you shan't go!"

"By George, I've got to," said Mary.

"Well, by George, you'll come right back. Listen to me."

Leaning forward over her desk, he eagerly unfolded his leading plan, elaborated by him in the night season. This plan involved an immediate appeal to the State Board of Education, which body had the power of overriding all acts of local school boards. Chalmers Brown, the young Attorney-General of the State and Charles's good friend, was an *ex-officio* member of this august body. Brown would arrange to have a meeting called at once, ostensibly on other business, if necessary. Mary Wing would find herself triumphantly back in this office within two weeks from to-day. And as for —

But at the first mention of the State Board, Mary had begun to shake her head, and before Charles had got his plan fairly set out she interrupted him, rather (it seemed to him) as an older brother interrupts.

"No, I've thought that over very carefully. Mysinger's pull has me beaten there before I begin. I'd only be playing into his hand, don't you see — giving the State Board a public opportunity to indorse and approve my punishment."

"But, great heavens! Mysinger's not the whole show here. You overrate —"

"He is, and he is n't. Some good men, like Creamer, are against me now, it's true. And yet, if Mysinger let either Board know that he wanted me back here, I'd come back to-morrow. He's that much of the show, Mr. Garrott."

Charles argued warmly. He was chagrined at the ease and decision with which the sure young woman brushed his arguments aside. Nor did the consciousness that she was probably sound in her positions soothe his masculine sense of the fitness of things at all. With a subtle loss of enthusiasm, he broached

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his second plan; and it too was summarily thrown out of court. That plan had called for an investigation of the "due cause" by the City Council — an intention attributed by the generous "Post" reporter to the well-known citizen, unnamed. Finding his supporting shoulder thus rejected, Charles demanded what was *her* plan, then. And it seemed that Mary's plan was merely to wait until May, when the terms of three members of the local Board expired (all of them Mysinger men), and then to see to it that these places were filled with men friendly to her.

The plan seemed to the young man so feeble and remote, so uncharacteristic and tame, as to indicate a certain indifference in her. He sat eyeing her a moment with intent speculation, and then said deliberately: —

"That's good enough for publication purposes, I suppose. But — you're thinking of something very different, are n't you?"

"Am I? — what do you suspect?" said Mary, continuing her labors of paper-sorting.

"It's occurred to me that you have rather a brilliant revenge up your sleeve all the time. What'll you care for little pigs like Mysinger, when you go off as General Secretary of the League?"

The self-contained young woman surprised him by throwing both arms above her head and saying, passionately: "If I only could! Oh, oh! If I only could!"

Charles's gaze became fixed. "But you're going to, are n't you?"

Her arms fell and she said, in another voice: "No, I don't think I'm going to land it, you see!"

"Not going to —! Why, I thought you were practically sure!"

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"That's the worst of it — I *was*, for a few wild weeks. Now I'm positive I'm not."

"Why! — but what's happened?"

"Oh," said she, light and calm again, "merely reading between the lines of Dr. Ames's letters. I hear from him all the time about the State work — once a week, at least. But he's never referred at all to the talk we had — about my being Secretary — from the first. Of course, I've wondered. And then yesterday — no, day before — I had a letter asking if I expected to be in New York any time before fall. He said he'd like to talk with me about my work here."

The straightforward sentences carried a painful conviction. Charles's eyes fell from his friend's face. For this crowning disappointment of hers he was distressed enough, indeed; and yet he was perfectly conscious that there was a side of him which could not lament at all. Publicly speaking, he had not honestly viewed the secretaryship as a "revenge"; since to get Mary out of the schools, by hook or crook, was the exact object in life of her adversary, Mysinger, who so earnestly held that woman's place was the Home. And then, there were those more personal and secret reactions in him, which had somehow recoiled from this development of the Career from the start.

"How long have you felt this way — that you were n't going to get it?"

"Oh — for two months now, at least."

"Two months! Why, you've never said anything about it to me!"

"Well, I don't remember your asking anything about it."

"No, because I supposed it was virtually settled —"

"Oh, no, indeed. In fact — oh, it was just a mad dream for me, of course! I'll live and die a Grammar School teacher."

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"No! I swear you'll not!" And, seeing the way cleared of all extra-complications now, the young man flung out with unwonted exuberance: "You trust *me!* You'll come back here so quickly you'll not remember you ever went!"

But the male protectorship, he should have known well, scarcely thrived in this atmosphere. Mary tied a package of papers, gave him a look and smile, and dropped it efficiently into the suitcase at her feet.

"Well, that's on the knees of the gods as yet. Meanwhile — there's no use crying over spilt milk."

"My point is, don't you see, this milk shan't stay spilt! *I'm* not going to wait till May to have you back here."

It was on the tip of his tongue to confide to her then, for her comfort, the third plan he had for her, a plan more circuitous and elaborate than either of his others, but yet, given time, his personal favorite from the beginning. However, Mary's little laugh checked him. The laugh may have been the best cover she had for feelings deeply bruised, after all, perhaps: but the breath of it chilled the young man's ardors effectually.

"I'm afraid you must, though! This milk —"

"I decline. Trust me, I say. I intend to help you here."

But her reply was to put into words of one syllable, at last, what her manner had been saying plainly from the beginning: —

"My dear friend, you *can't* help me, in this."

She added, quietly snapping on a light: "Don't worry your head about it any more, please. Whatever can be done, — I can and will do it, you may be sure."

It was odd how completely this silenced the young man. It was as if she had suddenly blown up the whole line of their communication.

And it seemed to Charles, all at once, that Mary had acci-

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dentally stated exactly what was the matter with her, as a woman and a friend. It seemed to him suddenly that ever since he had known this girl he had been going to her and saying, "Look here, I'll help you do such and such," and she, in one way or another, had always been replying, "Why, *you* could n't help *ME*!"

The conversation between the two old friends thus abruptly thinned out. It became almost desultory on his part, not untouched with dignity. And as they so chatted of Lee Grammar School and its unfavorable location, he, the authority, was eyeing Mary Wing askance, unmistakably reacting. . . . Was hardness, then, the necessary corollary of "independence"? Was it true, exactly as Old Tories said, that a woman could not grapple long with actuality without rubbing away that natural sweetness and charm of hers which, it might be, the grim world needed more than duplicate Careers? Certainly there was no charm for him in this slip of a girl's self-assertion: "I'm a better man than you, don't you know it?" Splendid, indeed, was her Spartan calm in a defeat serious in every way, and with the peculiar sting conferred by Miss Trevenna's fame. Why was it that he would have warmed to her so infinitely more, have felt quite a new depth of affection for her, if, rather, she had turned to him helpless and wildly weeping, "Help me! Help me, friend, or I perish!"

"And at least you'll get out much earlier in the afternoons," he was observing courteously. . . .

But his secret thought continued to engross him, this fantastic thought of Mary weeping. Now he remembered Miss Angela's girlish outburst last night, after the bridge-party; and he saw that there was something subtly fitting, engaging on the whole, in a woman's weeping over her troubles. But Mary, of course, could not weep; she simply did n't have the

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plant, as you might put it. No — you could picture Mary asking you to sit on the sofa and look at her ring, more easily than weeping.

And then, becoming aware of a teacher hovering about in the corridor near the door, — a fellow named Hartwell it was, who had long seemed rather attentive to Mary, — Charles Garrott rose to go, a mere polite caller.

“Is n’t it time you were knocking off?”

“I think I’d better clear up a little more of this, now that I’m at it.”

“I wonder if I could n’t help you with some of that?”

“Oh, no, thank you.” (Why, of course he could n’t help HER, even to tear up old papers.) “Nobody could understand it but me. But I’ve — appreciated your visit.”

He wished her a good-afternoon. In a stately silence, he traversed the spacious corridor, stalked down the handsome stairways. For the moment, he could not get his thought back to the concrete; the sting of defeat possessed him, the bitterness that is the portion of the friend of women. And then, in this mood, shaking the dust of the High School from his feet, he encountered, of all inopportune people under the sun, Miss Flora Trevenna.

He came upon the unhappy girl standing in a corner of the outer vestibule, beyond the great bronze doors; she stood alone, looking off down the twilight street. Her head turned at the sound of Charles’s feet; recognition came hesitatingly into her glance, and she bowed, smiling remotely in the absent or reserved way which seemed to be characteristic of her. It was clearly on a second thought that she spoke suddenly, in her fluty voice: —

“Oh! — could you tell me whether Miss Wing is still in the building?”

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Pausing, his hat stiffly raised, the young man said that Miss Wing was. "You'll find her in her office — on the third floor at the front, you know."

"Thank you."

But, as he bowed and passed on, the Badwoman made no move to enter and ascend. She stood as he had found her, waiting, aside: a solitary and withdrawn figure, for the moment to the perceiving eye not untouched with pathos.

But Charles, proceeding, could see in this figure only the witting cause of all the trouble. He had spoken kindly enough to Miss Trevenna: now suddenly all his accumulated and complex resentment seemed to gather and pour out. Could n't the woman leave Mary alone, even on this day? But no — of course she could n't! She who had claimed her Happiness over her mother's heart would see nothing amiss in seeking to scramble back to good repute by the same general route. It was her Higher Law to throw her blight over all who might assist her: over her friend, Mary Wing, no more than over her own young sisters, from whom (Judge Blenso said) people were already silently dropping away, now that it was known that the "free" Miss Flora came sometimes to the house.

Free! . . . Was not here, indeed, that underside of "Freedom," that true reverse of Taking My Happiness, which the New speakers never mentioned? This girl conceived freedom just as a Developed Ego would conceive it, as an order of things in which she should be "free," while every one else, going on as usual, sacrificed and denied to uphold her comfort and support her illimitable selfishness. In her goings out and comings in, she would take no thought but for her Self. And there she stood, no leader of a new dawn, but a true enemy of the common good: a female Anti-Social, a lawless Egoette, who maintained that the world was ordered and the sun set in

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the heavens, that she only might indulge herself where her whim led. . . .

On the corner the young man halted, shook himself slightly, and glanced up and down. A brief anxiousness crossed his face, followed by an air of irresolution.

This street, Albemarle, was three blocks from Washington, and certainly not a street that a pleasure-walker, like Miss Angela, would be likely to pick out. Charles's legs seemed to thirst for exercise. But it was clear to him that it would not do to run any superfluous risks; especially just now, when it was all so fresh and new. Therefore, after a moment of struggle, the authority once more set his face ingloriously toward the street-cars.

And as he went he began to think again, more intently than he had thought in all the thoughtful day. He had taken that challenge of Mary's full in the face, as it were. She had said, as if in final summary of their relations, that he was incapable of helping her. Very well; he had a clear field now to show her, once and for all, whether or not that was true.

That third plan of his (of which she should hear no inkling now till the thing was done) was nothing less than to roll up such a body of Public Opinion as would overwhelm the School Board—a body somewhat sensitive to Opinion—forcing it to reverse itself. This could not be done in a day, of course. To gather momentum enough to rouse the local papers would mean to start far back. So Charles's mind had fastened at once on his old idea of a thoroughgoing eulogistic "write-up" of Mary, to begin with, in some national magazine of the highest standing. Only now his soaring ambition was to "plant" three such write-ups at least—cunningly differentiated in matter and manner, and signed with different names. Nor did this seem by any means a dream. From the periodicals

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themselves, he saw that there was a demand for just such "stuff" nowadays, just such little smartly-written sketches of "people who were doing things." Mary did things, without a doubt. And once he got the write-ups in print, — even two write-ups, or one, — he had a powerful bludgeon to swing at the local editors. "Look here," he would say to them, "why do we have to go away from home to learn the news? Are you fellows going to sit still and say nothing while some live city gets this woman for Superintendent of Schools? Why don't you . . ."

The imaginary exhortation ended there. Round the corner ahead of Charles a man came swinging just then, rapidly drawing near. And all small plottings were catapulted from the mind of Mary's friend as he looked into the face of Mr. Mysinger.

The principal of the High School approached with a native swagger, on much "shined" shoes. He was what is called a careful dresser; a heavily built man, fair and not ill-looking. Ten steps away, his eye fell on Charles, and, while his lips assumed a gracious smile, the eye in question seemed to lighten with a flash of triumph. And the sight of Miss Trevenna was nothing to that sight. All the blood in the young man's body seemed suddenly to be pounding in his head.

"Well, Garrott! How goes it to-day?"

It had not occurred to him to "cut" Mysinger, but so the matter seemed to be written in the stars. In silence, the passing author looked the principal through and through. And his head grew hotter, and the pit of his stomach icier, as he saw Mysinger's smile become fixed, saw it waver doubtfully and die, saw open hostility slide into the hated eye. So Mary Wing's conqueror and her unhelpful friend went by at half a foot.

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"By George! I'll beat up that rascal yet for this!"

The unliterary words were ejected, it seemed, by a demon within. But no sooner had they fallen on the ear of Charles than all the rest of him leapt upon and seized them, as one recognizing a long-felt want, an unconquerable need. And thus his writer's imagination was off upon yet another plan, the last and the best.

Yes, that was what he wanted, needed now, more than anything else. He would humiliate this swaggering Teuton past all endurance; he would go and kick him till his weary legs refused the office; he would batter him till his own wife passed him by for a stranger. Lord, what a plan! And then, the moment he could leave the hospital, Mysinger would crawl around to Olive Street, hat in hand. "Miss Wing, I'm petitioning the Board to invite you back to the High School at once," he would say. "I humbly beg you to come, and try to forgive me for my contemptible conduct in the past. I don't know why I've always acted like such a dirty dog" (Mysinger would say). "It's just my low, base nature, I guess." And Mary, starting up in surprise (but, perhaps, already half-suspecting the truth), would say: "But this is astounding, Mr. Mysinger! How come you here, saying these things to me?" And that insolent fellow, whiter than death, would mumble through swollen lips, "It's Mr. Garrott's orders, miss."

Then Mary would, perhaps, understand a little better whether or not a *man* could help her. . . .

The author turned suddenly on the darkling street, moved by an instinct to look after his retiring enemy. By an odd coincidence, Principal Mysinger had been moved by an instinct to turn and look after him, Charles. Both men turned hastily round again.

So Charles, halting on the corner for his car, shook himself

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once again, reined in his imagination, and remembered that he was a modern and civilized being. For the moment, the reminder seemed to accomplish little. The blood continued to pound in the sedentary temples, redly. Charles saw that the idea of primitive male combat, over a manly woman's Career, was unmodern and grotesque. But the idea lingered all the same.

He spent the evening upon the first of his write-ups, scenarios shut fast in the drawer. This piece concerned Mary Wing the Educator, and the intention was to have Mary's friend, Hartwell, read, sign, and father it. Every precaution must be taken, of course, to give the whole thing a spontaneous air, avoiding the appearance of a concerted boom. By midnight, the first draft of the Educator write-up was finished, and, wearied, the young man picked up the "Post," where he had had eyes but for one story that morning.

Here his wandering glance fell presently upon this: —

Miss Angela Flower entertained at bridge last evening at the residence of her parents, Dr. and Mrs. Oscar P. Flower. Miss Flower's guests included a limited number of the younger set.

At this description of himself and Fanny, Charles smiled, for almost the first time that day. But as he continued to gaze at that small hopeful item, his mirth faded, and soon he began to stroke the bridge of his nose, his look distinctly worried.

X

IN the little house of the Flowers, Miss Angela sat forlorn at her favorite post. She entertained the younger set no more. It was the middle of December, and a cold rain poured. With a ragged bit of chamois, the old-fashioned girl polished her already comely nails. The window-curtain, shrunken and twisted with more than one washing, was hooked back on a convenient nail; now and then Angela picked up her shabby opera-glasses and peeped over into the fan-shaped sliver of Washington Street. But few pedestrians passed over there to-day, and the motor-cars of the Blessed slid by in curtains of waterproof.

It was the slack hour again, it seemed, leaving home-makers with idle hands. Even that subtle business to which but one modern authority gave a scientific rating, the Business of Supplying Beauty and Supplying Charm, was here at a complete standstill. The men of Angela's family, who must be refreshed and made joyful for their battlings in the world without, were at this hour out, battling. Mrs. Flower was lying down in her room, doing her own refreshing. As for the cook downstairs, she had her orders, and recked not of Charm. Angela, thus, had her strictly earned leisure; and, on the other hand, she had not those intenser occupations for leisure, reforms, fights, and attacks on Morals, such as engrossed the mind of her advanced Cousin Mary. As a womanly woman, she naturally thought a great deal about people, her friends, and as an unassisted stranger in the city, she really had very few friends to think about. Hence, it was the most natural

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thing imaginable if she was now wondering, for the thousandth time, what in the world had become of Mr. Garrott.

Angela could not understand about Mr. Garrott. He simply never seemed to walk any more. That she had hurt his feelings very badly that night after the bridge-party she had understood, from the start. But perhaps she had never meant to hurt them so badly as this; and that Mr. Garrott could vanish utterly from Washington Street had, indeed, not entered her thoughts. This, however, was precisely what Mr. Garrott had done, from the very day following the misunderstanding.

For so, in the lapse of days, had Angela generously come to think of the occurrence on the sofa. She and Mr. Garrott had had a terrible misunderstanding.

It was half-past four o'clock; the dreary day was shutting in. Angela looked down into her own back yard, which was small, mean-looking, not devoid of tin cans, and now running with dirty water. A dingy old shed or outhouse, where some previous tenant had thriftily stabled a horse, contributed not a little to the wintry desolateness of the scene. Beneath the window the cook, Luemma, emerged, a ragged print-skirt turned over her head, and emptied ashes into a broken wooden barrel. Angela yawned, and picked up a hand-glass.

The girl's more kindly view of Mr. Garrott's demeanor had been, of course, a gradual growth. Her mortification and rage against the young tribute-payer had lasted two days, at least, and chancing to see her poor Cousin Mary at this time, — who was now being talked about from one end of the town to the other, — she had taken occasion to speak most disparagingly of Mr. Garrott, though, of course, in an indirect manner. She had described him as a person of the *lowest ideals*. At this



ANGELA PEEPED OVER INTO WASHINGTON STREET

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Cousin Mary had protested, quite indignantly; and, though Angela well knew there were phases of Mr. Garrott which her mannish cousin was not likely ever to see, that stout championship had doubtless done much to check her first resentment and make her see things in a truer light. Moreover, she was naturally a sweet-tempered creature, and the long days following, and the long empty walks, may have been just the things needed to appeal most subtly to her higher nature. After all, Mr. Garrott had been remarkably nice to her, paying her every attention from the beginning. And even if he *had* been carried away, for once—what did that show . . .

A ring at the doorbell made Angela jump a little. While the Flowers had a small house, they had a loud bell. Though its clanging nowadays rarely meant anything exciting, the diversion, on the whole, was not unwelcome. The young housekeeper rose, went out into the hall, and listened down over the banisters.

Below, there was nothing to listen to. Receiving only twelve dollars a month, Luemma seemed to think she must take out the residue of her wages in inefficiency and impudence, and did; sometimes she answered the bell, sometimes she “had her hands in the lightbread,” etc. The present seemed to be one of the latter times. The bell pealed again; a voice from the front called, “Angela! — are you dressed?” — and Angela, replying to her mother, went down to the door herself, smoothing her hair and trimming her waist as she went.

The caller proved to be none other than her disgraced cousin, Mary Wing.

“Well, Angela, how are you?” said she, entering confidently, and kissed Angela’s cheek. “I hope I did n’t break into your nap, or anything unforgivable like that?”

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"Oh, no, indeed, Cousin Mary. How d' you do? I was n't asleep."

Cousin Mary was enveloped from neck to heels in a becoming gray raincoat. Beneath that were seen glimpses of a costume rather elaborate for bad weather and a workaday world. Nor did Cousin Mary's manner seem in the least crushed or subdued, as morals demanded that the manner of a disgraced person should be.

All the same, Angela greeted her cordially enough, with only a faint conscientious stiffness traceable to her mother. For one thing, she was really sorry for Mary now; right or wrong, she genuinely wished they had n't expelled her from the High School, and sent her off to a Grammar School, in a low quarter of the city. And then besides that, whatever Cousin Mary's strange ideas and behavior, the fact remained that she happened still to be one of her, Angela's, particular little coterie — that small group of friends and relatives with whom she herself seemed to be sadly out of touch just now.

Mary entered with the air of being in a hurry. In the car-shaped parlor she unbuttoned her coat, nevertheless, the Latrobe heater being, like the doorbell, small but powerful. Angela, seated on the famous sofa, said: —

"Cousin Mary, you're all dressed up! I believe you're going to a party!"

Mary glanced down at herself with indifference.

"No," said she, "but I've been to a little sort of one, a luncheon. And we did n't leave the hotel till half an hour ago, either —"

"Oh, a luncheon! They're fun, I think. Where was it?"

"At the Arlington — very fine and beautiful, but it took hours! That's why I'm so late getting around here. I've wanted specially to see you for several days, Angela, but I

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have n't seemed to find a minute, and this was my last chance. I wondered if you had any engagement for to-morrow afternoon?"

"No, indeed, Cousin Mary, I have n't any engagement."

"Then I want you to come with me to a lecture," said Cousin Mary, "at four o'clock."

The young girl's face, which had become brightly expectant at the mention of engagements, fell perceptibly. She covered her disappointment with a little laugh.

"Well, — thank you, very much, Cousin Mary, — but you know I don't appreciate lectures very much. I'm not clever enough —"

"But this is n't an ordinary lecture. In fact, I should n't have used that word at all. It's a talk, a personal talk to women by a woman, and a wonderful one — Dr. Jane Rainey. You may have heard of her?"

"Well, I'm not sure. What is she going to talk about?" asked Angela politely.

"The subject that means most to every woman, no matter what she thinks or says! And Dr. Rainey, I do believe, knows more about it than anybody else living. Jane Clemm she was — but that was years ago, before you could remember. I got her to come here to speak, myself, — and expect to lose some money on the transaction, too, — heigho! But I don't mind really, it's such a privilege to have the whole subject lit up, from the modern point of view, by a speaker like this. Jane Rainey's a practicing physician, a fine human being, the mother of four children herself, and she —"

"But what *is* her subject, Cousin Mary?"

"That's it! — marriage and motherhood."

Angela stared at her cousin, and then looked rather shocked. Next, faint color appeared in her smooth cheeks.

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It really seemed that Mary had learned nothing, from the painful lesson she had just received. Why did she have this persistent interest in the unpleasant side of life?

She said more decisively than was her wont: "No, Cousin Mary, I really don't think I'd care to go — thank you."

Mary Wing, checked in her forensic by Angela's expression, looked surprised, though, perhaps, not taken aback, and certainly not rebuked.

"Now, why not? I honestly hoped the subject would have a special interest for you. You —"

"For me! — Oh, no! I —"

"My dear, you know you told me once what your ambition was — to be a good wife some day, when the right man came for you. And that's the ambition of every normal woman, I believe, — or one of them, — no matter what else she may have in her head! Well, you see, that's exactly what this brilliant student — and woman — wants to advise us about — how to fulfill this ambition; how to prepare ourselves to be good wives and —"

"But I don't think of it that way at all, Cousin Mary. I hope," said Angela, pink-cheeked, but once more standing firm for propriety against all the astonishing Newness — "I hope I'll know how to be a good wife — to the man I love — without going to any lectures —"

"Do you think anybody on earth knows as much as that, just by intuition? It seems to me . . . But perhaps your feeling is — you don't like the idea of a public talk on the subject?"

"I don't, Cousin Mary — frankly. I know I seem to you dreadfully behind the times — and all. But that's the way I was brought up to feel, and it's the way I do feel. I'm not advanced at all, I thought you knew."

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There was a silence in the dingy little parlor, during which the pouring rain became audible.

"Of course I don't want to press you against your will, Angela," said Mary slowly. "You know that? But — I can't get away from feeling that being a good wife — and mother — in this awfully upset, transitional age, when men's ideals are changing step for step with women's — and perhaps a little in advance of them, who knows? — I believe it's the most complicated and difficult vocation in the world. Compared with it, any ordinary man's profession — like engineering, for instance — looks to me like simplicity itself. And, Angela, I can't believe that every woman is born with all this understanding, all this difficult expert knowledge in her head, any more than I believe that every man is born knowing by intuition how to be a good engineer. Of course we'd think it quite strange — should n't we? — if Donald, as a boy wanting to be an engineer, had thought he must n't read any books that mentioned engineering, and must stop his ears if —"

Angela, feeling almost ready to stop her ears herself, interrupted with some warmth: —

"Cousin Mary, we simply don't understand each other! I don't think of — of romance — and marriage — as anything in the least like *engineering* — not in the least! I don't think of them as subjects for lectures by *experts*! And I was brought up to feel there were some things not very — suitable to talk about. I was brought up not to think about them at all."

"Of course, my dear! — I understand. But every woman thinks about marriage — does n't she? She can't help it. Take me," said Mary, good-humoredly — "a confirmed old maid school-teacher who's just scandalized half the city, and been publicly dismissed from her job. I have n't the slightest

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idea of marrying, ever, and yet I think about it often, and would like to feel —”

“You do? Well, I am different. I *don't* think about it.”

“You don't think about marriage?”

“I never think of it at all,” said Angela.

That settled Cousin Mary. After a brief pause she said, in the nicest way: “Well, then, forgive me, Angela, and forget everything I've said.”

Angela forgave her readily enough. Shut your eyes to the horrid, unwomanly streak in her, and Mary Wing was really a very pleasant person. She had always said that, to her mother and others. So talk flowed easily into other channels, and the air of cousinly amity was soon restored. But just when that was accomplished, Mary rose unexpectedly to go, and Angela found herself left with several topics not yet mentioned at all.

“Oh, don't go yet!” said she. “I want to —”

“I *must*! I really had no time at all to-day, but came anyway, whether or no. How pretty you look, Angela,” said Mary, and kissed the now unblushing cheek again.

“I wish the lunch-party had n't kept you so long! I have n't —”

“I do, too! A whole good afternoon! And the worst of it was,” said Mary, eyeing her with a sort of speculative archness, “I stayed after everybody was gone just to talk to Charles Garrott, whom you dislike so much! Still,” she added, with a fading of archness, “I had something to tell him for his own good, at least.”

Cousin Mary's changes of expression were lost upon Angela. “Mr. Garrott! Was he at the lunch party?”

“He gave it — did n't I say? It was just a little *bon voyage*

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party for Donald — and Helen Carson! Donald's leaving to-morrow for Wyoming, you know, to be gone a month —"

"No — you had n't told me. . . . Who else was at the lunch, Cousin Mary?"

"Oh, just those I've mentioned, and Fanny for chaperon, and Talbott Maxon."

Angela, naturally, felt more lonely and out of things than ever. In fact, she felt blankly depressed. Mr. Garrott's luncheon had included exactly her coterie, only she herself being omitted.

"Why do you say I dislike Mr. Garrott, Cousin Mary? Of course I like him very much. You know I told you long ago he was much the most attractive man I've met here."

"Well, but I thought you must have changed your opinion, when you told me the other day that his ideals were so low."

"Why, of course I did n't *mean* it, Cousin Mary! I thought you knew I was angry when I spoke."

The two cousins regarded each other, in the dark little hall by the hatstand. Angela felt her position to be annoying. But she explained with that complete lack of embarrassment characteristic only of women conscious of rectitude: —

"I can't tell you *all* about it, even now. But what happened was that Mr. Garrott and I had a terrible misunderstanding, and at first I put all the blame on him, and was awfully mad with him, I admit. But since then, the more I've thought of it, the more I've seen that I was very unjust to him — in what I thought and said, too. He really has much more cause to be mad with me — now — than I have with him."

"Well, I'm glad to hear it. Don't quarrel — that's my motto," said the stormy Miss Wing. "And Mr. Garrott thinks you are charming! — I know, for he told me so. Well —"

"Yes — that's what has changed my feeling about it all,

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you see. Cousin Mary — when you see him again, you might just say —”

“My dear, I never see Mr. Garrott!” said Mary, rather hastily.

“Why, you’ve just seen him!”

“The first time for a week, and probably the last time for a month. He’s going down to his mother’s in the country on Saturday, to stay over Christmas and New Year’s. Angela, I must *run!*”

Left alone, Angela remained standing in the hall for a moment, gazing into space, of which the hall really afforded little. Her despondency now had a certain edge; it did seem hard that, while her friends and relatives — and Cousin Mary, of all people — were going to jolly lunches of the younger set, *her* invitations should be only to New-Woman *lectures*. And still, the girl’s feeling had no bitterness, even now. Of course she understood that she would have been at Mr. Garrott’s luncheon, too, but for the misunderstanding. . . .

As she went upstairs, her mother called out to her, and Angela pursued her way to the front bedroom, as she had meant to do anyway. Here, her mother was discovered prone upon a pillowless lounge, dangerously facing a gaslight and reading a magazine which had no covers. Having laid the magazine, broken open, on her lap, Mrs. Flower listened attentively to her daughter’s report of Mary’s call, and at the end said: —

“I must say I think it’s very kind of Mr. Garrott to stand by her in that way. Men secretly can never admire that sort of woman, whatever their theories may be. And that’s just it — that explains Mary’s whole lurid course. If she had ever had a ray of attention, of course she would never have dreamed of these wild goings on.”

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Angela's mother was still a pretty woman, and long habit, it seemed, had impressed her voice with a permanent plain-tiveness. She had kicked off her slippers for comfort; her high-bred feet were clad in faded cotton stockings; she herself looked high-bred and faded. Her air and tone were those of one to whom life had brought rude shocks — such as, that lovely woman's portion was sacrifice ever, and that men cared only for the first bloom of girlish beauty — and who found her only consolations in her religion, and in the noble words, My Duty.

"You must see her when she calls, I suppose, but that is all. Until she completely changes her ideas on all subjects, I cannot allow any intimacy. I cannot."

"She means to be nice to me, mother. And besides — that's the sort of connections you and father have given us, you know."

Mrs. Flower denied any responsibility whatever for the advanced Mary. She continued her remarks with interest, the theme being one of her favorites. Angela, having moved restlessly about the room for a time, had halted at the window. Hence, she gazed out at a board fence billed all over with advertisements of a celebrated spring tonic. A trolley-car went rumbling by, its wheels throwing off jets of icy rain-water. It had been a long, long day.

"The things women will do when they discover they're not attractive to men! They simply get defiant. They get all reckless and bitter!"

Into the narrow walkway below turned a very tall man, under a small greenish umbrella. In the silence of the house, the front door was heard to open and shut. Then there were footsteps along the hall below, and another door shut quietly, toward the back.

"Anything, anything to distract their minds!"

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"Mother! — where on earth do you suppose father *goes*? His lecture was over at half-past three. If only, *only*, he'd try to get some patients! But he's not even in for his office hour half the time!"

"I'm sure I do not know," replied her mother, generally, and picked up her coverless magazine.

Angela fidgeted at the window, drumming on the dripping pane. Presently she said: —

"Oh, mother! Why *could n't* you or father have some relations that would help us! We're the only family I ever heard of that has n't a *single* rich relation!"

Her mother, not looking up, mentioned complainingly the branch of her family to which she always referred in such discussions.

"Much good the Ashburtons have done us!" said Angela truly, and also as usual. "When they think we're not good enough to speak to. I have nobody to help me but myself."

It was as if the girl was herself struck with the truth of her own observation. Her gaze out the window became thoughtful, and then intent. Suddenly, without more speech, she left the window and the room.

In the hall there came an interruption. An untutored voice bawled up, without the slightest preamble: —

"*Sugar has n't came!*"

"All right," responded the young housekeeper, after a short annoyed pause.

And then, returning to her own room, she thought: "If I telephone from Mrs. Doremus's now, it'll be too late for supper. I'll have to ask Wallie — just to step around . . ."

Angela shut the door behind her and lighted a flaring gas-jet. Then she stood still, knitting her brows slightly, glanc-

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ing about. She wanted writing-paper, and did n't know where to put her hands on any, exactly.

In the sharp light of the gas it was now seen that Angela's little bedroom lacked Beauty, of the purely objective sort: Beauty of that kind depending, as all know, on fathers being good providers, which was not the case here, alas. Everything in Angela's room was cheap when it was new, and everything was far from new now. A very large old walnut wardrobe occupied all one side of the room, awkwardly substituting for a clothes-closet. The bed was of yellow imitation-oak, and sagged considerably in the middle from worn-out springs. The bureau was to match; its somewhat wavy mirror was the nearest Angela came to a dressing-table; its three drawers would never quite shut, and frequently would n't quite open. There were also two chairs in the bedroom, one straight, one a re-seated rocker, and a small walnut work-table, which trembled dangerously if you brushed against it.

Nor was the room specially spruce, at the moment at least, people's tastes differing in these matters, even in the same family. Angela's young brother, for example, kept his small room shining like a new pin, and let himself personally go till he was a disgrace to the family. Angela, on the other hand, whose exquisite personal neatness had attracted the notice of Charles Garrott himself, was more or less indifferent about a room which nobody but the family ever saw. The door of the wardrobe stood open now, with one of the yellow bureau-drawers; a pair of shoes rested on the straight chair, with a pair of stockings curled on the rag-carpet below. On the sway-backed bed were strewn various things — a towel, two old summer dresses that she had been trying on a little earlier in the afternoon, a pair of soiled white gloves, a paper of pins and two new dress-shields.

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In the drawer of the wardrobe, Angela presently found several sheets of note-paper, and, after a longer search, a single envelope. The envelope was not what it had been once. It had knocked about the world a bit in its time; its bright youth was gone. Upon its face was a dusky smudge, souvenir of some forgotten encounter, and, near the smudge, some hand had once written the word "Mrs.," and then lost heart and abandoned the whole enterprise. Still, it was possibly the only envelope in the house. Angela found, after due trial, that the smudge yielded, quite satisfactorily, to the eraser on the end of a pencil. As for the reminiscent "Mrs.," that was easily enough worked over into a "Mr.," though not, to be sure, without a slight blot.

Angela sat on the edge of the bed. She pulled the rickety work-table into position before her. Having addressed the remainder of the envelope, after the "Mr.," she sat biting the penholder for a space. But when the business end of the pen was put into action, it went ahead quite steadily:—

DEAR MR. GARROTT [wrote Angela from the bedside]:—

When you left here the other night, I did not think it would be so long before I would see you again!

I have been very sorry about our misunderstanding — and I have felt that I should not have said what I did. I have thought it all over, and I understand better now.

When you are not so busy, you must come in to see me — and I will explain just what I mean. I could n't that night.

Yours most cordially,

ANGELA FLOWER.

She had hardly written the final letter of her pretty name when the front door was heard to open again, this time with a bang. Having hastily tucked the note into the experienced envelope, Angela got downstairs before her little brother, Wallie, had finished taking off his dripping overcoat.

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Wallie was quite the queerest, gravest boy Angela had ever known. In her whole life, she had never seen him laugh but once. That was one summer day in Mitchellton, when she, having undertaken to paper the walls of her room, had fallen backward off the stepladder into a bucket of paste. Wallie was an eccentric, undoubtedly. Still, he was admitted to be obliging enough about little things. Now he made no special objections to going for the sugar; and when Angela then asked him please to step by at the same time, and give the note to Mr. Garrott, he only said, with one of his absent stares: "Step by? That's six blocks further."

"Well, I have n't anybody else to take it for me, Wallie," said Angela, in a voice rather like her mother's.

"And, Wallie," she added, presently, "I'm not sure whether there'll be an answer or not. You'd better just ask him, that's the best way. Just say, after he's read it, 'Is there any answer?'"

XI

TO the host, the luncheon party at the Arlington had not once presented itself as a jolly gathering of any set, young or old. He had conceived it as a duty, and an expensive one; he approached it, truth to tell, with a certain secret complacency as to Mary Wing uppermost in his mind; and he left it (after Mary's private talk with him) with chastened reflections and a group of new reactions on the subject of Egoettes.

For two weeks, Charles had been very busy in the Studio. The luncheon stood as his first whirl in Society since Angela Flower's bridge-party. Donald Manford, departing to seek his biggest commission, seemed to need a friendly send-off. Miss Carson seemed to be indicated as the logical co-sharer of the same. At the Redmantle Club, as he had never forgotten, Charles had taken Donald bodily away from the firm beautiful girl Mary had selected to be his wife. Now, as it were, he was handing Donald back to her again — loyal Moderns all. Beyond the matchmaking, however, this function was intended to cheer up Mary, and to indicate to the Public that Charles Garrott was her supporter in adversity as in success. Thus, from every point of view, the "demoted" school-teacher was the real guest of honor, and the host, when not fomenting conversation of a matrimonial nature between the two young persons on his right, found a peculiar pleasure in conversing with her. Indeed, he could hardly look at Mary to-day without a lurking smile.

Later, as noted, Charles sobered. What Mary lingered to

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tell him, "for his own good," was that Flora Trevenna had gone away. As it was the one thing he had supposed Miss Trevenna incapable of doing, he was proportionately taken by surprise. But, for a moment, he saw in the tidings only that the great obstacle in his and Mary's way back to the High School, their common Old Man of the Sea, had been amazingly removed.

Endeavoring to conceal his immense relief, he said: "Gone away! Why, where 'd she go to?"

Mary's reply was meant to shake him, and it did.

"Oh — anywhere! She went, not because she had anywhere to go, but just because she would n't stay here."

"But — I don't understand you! I thought this was where she wanted to stay."

"More than anything else in the world. And that was why she went — don't you see? She went because of her mother and father and sisters — whom you supposed she never gave a thought to. She went because of Mysinger and me."

The two advanced friends stood among the shrubs of the Arlington winter garden, beside a little tinkling grotto. In silence, Charles dropped a pebble down among the dusky forms of fish.

"Of course," said Mary, slowly, "I told her a story about — my trouble at the High School. But I could see that she knew all the time. I'm sure now that was what decided her to go — by herself. Some friend or other got her some sort of position — in Philadelphia. Of course she went without saying anything to me. . . ."

Her voice, which could be so annoyingly calm at times, was deeply troubled. Charles expressed sympathies, with haste; and, indeed, he felt them now, oddly and disturbingly. It was as if Miss Trevenna, by that simple act of getting down off

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other people's backs, had too suddenly upset his whole opinion of her.

"Don't you think, after all," he said presently, "it may be easier for her somewhere else for a while, than —"

"Oh, easier in a way, yes! But I know she felt, and I think, too, that her only hope of really putting her life together again, ever, was here — where she broke it in two. To go and bury herself among strangers won't ever settle anything. Oh," exclaimed Mary, "if she could only, only *marry* now! I suppose people might stop thinking of her as a pariah then, I suppose she might come back! But what's the use of hoping? She's still crazily in love with that man, you see."

"What! — she *is*! Why'd she leave him then —?"

The former principal regarded him, drawing on her gloves. She had dark eyebrows, well-marked and unusually arched; they gave a peculiar intentness to her blue gaze, and a faint habitual interrogativeness. Now, perhaps at the young man's expression, she laughed, suddenly and naturally. Her spirit was not broken certainly.

"And women are really so awfully simple, too! Of course she left him, Mr. Garrott, because she did n't think he cared enough for her any longer to — justify her."

And, grave again, she asked, directly: "Have you really doubted that she has a higher ideal of love than half the good people who've wanted to run her out of the city and stone her?"

This, indeed, Charles had had no reason to doubt. He, of course, had never shared the low opinion of a woman, that she had but one virtue, and that one too crudely appraised. His complaint against this girl had been upon a wholly different ground — now abruptly fallen beneath his feet. He was troubled with the sense that this young figure, in vanishing,

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had suddenly touched the dignity of tragedy. He had remembered, with a little shock, that Miss Trevenna was not yet twenty-five years of age.

And still, he, the authority, knew that having a high ideal was not enough.

As the two moderns left the hotel, he said in a grave manner: "Let me take you home."

"No, don't think of it! I'm only going to the car-line," said Mary; and added absently: "I've been trying all week to go to see Angela, and now I must."

"Ah, yes! — certainly!" said the luncheon host hastily, and a look that could only be described as guilty flitted visibly over his face.

But this disappeared; the somewhat chastened authoritative look returned at once. Pursuing his tutorial round, Charles seemed able to think of nothing else but Mary's ill-starred friend, who had so damaged Mary, who had so staked and smashed her own life, on a sentence in a book.

And who put that sentence into a book, and who was going to wipe it out with another, if not he, Charles? Here, it might be, he had a pointer or two to give to that great compeer of his, the lady in Sweden.

He had done Miss Trevenna a serious wrong, of course; he had judged her by the company she kept. It was an age when cheeky "prophets" were shouting from every bush a New philosophy which amounted to this: that civilized society must be made accommodating to self-indulgent people. They did not mention, very probably they did not know, that it had not been easy to civilize society, and that self-indulgent people had not done the job. With such shallow egoists he had classed Miss Trevenna; and now, silent still, she had finely refuted him. There was, indeed, a quality not for little folk

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in this girl's fierce imprudences. At the test, she had repudiated the Ego, kicked off all the meanness and flabbiness of her teachings. But in the meantime, unfortunately, these teachings had done for her.

And it seemed to Charles Garrott, tramping intently along (for the downpour gave him the freedom of the streets to-day) that it would be a sweet and glorious thing if, say, a dozen of these leathern-lunged professors of a new chaos could be gathered up, from the studies and libraries where they sat so snug around the world, and brought here to share this girl's catastrophe and go with her in her exile. And by George! — they should n't squirm out by trying to blame it all on a mere ignorant Public Opinion either! No, he, Charles, having a lot of them together thus, would improve the occasion to explain, once and for all, that freedom was not a thing that any chance passer could pick up and use, like a cane; but, rather, the last difficult conquest of a unified race. He would inform them that it was only too fatally easy to act "free," at others' expense, the difficult and important thing being, precisely, not so to act. And as to love, he would hammer into their thick heads that the way to freedom was NOT through the delightfully easy course of "demonstrating experiment" by self-elected Exceptional People, but by the far more difficult demonstration that men and women could be strong and constant in their affections, and trustworthy in their passions.

There, indeed, was a demonstration for Exceptional People to get to work on at once. Why write large books to declare that "the great love" was its own justification. Why waste good ink upon an ideal truism? On what day would a New book-writer teach men and women how to love greatly, or how to tell even a little love from love's baser counterfeit? So long as every schoolboy, drawn by a brief spark, will swear

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that his is the great love; so long as men greatly love one person this year, and next year quite another; so long as they will gladly deceive themselves, or ape emotions above them, lest they must deny themselves a passing indulgence: thus long would untrustworthy mortals need the hard restraint of Law.

"Why, if men and women had the quality of love needed to make 'freedom' work," thought the tutor suddenly, sloshing along toward the Choristers', "they would n't need the freedom! No, then they'd be perfectly satisfied with monogamous marriage."

Decidedly impressed with this epigram, Charles thought at once of "Notes on Women." To draw the ruined life of Miss Trevenna across the line of his new novel had, of course, come into his mind while he yet talked with Mary. But he was fully aware that not one novel, or five, would ever plumb bottom here.

Nevertheless, these thoughts pursued the young man through his lesson with Miss Grace Chorister, and up to the very door of the Studio. There, he suddenly became a working author again.

It was now five-thirty o'clock in the rainy afternoon. The demands of hospitality had forced the postponement of Miss Grace a full hour, and the cutting altogether of the old lady who was studying French. Entering his retreat thus belatedly, Charles shot a look ahead at the writing-table, according to his habit. A letter lay on the table, wearing a distinctly business air; and when the young man was still several paces off, he saw that the envelope bore the name of "Willcox's Weekly."

For the most part, Charles's communications from editors had come to him in long envelopes of an ominous, a rejectional, fatness. Now it was his hour to see other samples from

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the editorial envelope supply, square envelopes, gratifyingly thin. Breaking the square thin envelope of "Willcox's Weekly" with nervous hurry, Charles read: —

DEAR MR. GARROTT: —

We have pleasure in accepting your interesting sketch of Miss Wing, for early publication in the WEEKLY. Our "Persons in the Foreground" department is always in the market for entertaining material of this character.

Check for \$20 will follow in due course. We are, with thanks,

Yours sincerely,

WILLCOX'S WEEKLY.

Having read these few lines once, the author, still standing, read them again, and yet again. Upon his lip was the faint smile it had worn when he looked at Mary at the luncheon — before she began telling him things for his good. He was fairly entitled to wear this smile; but now it seemed in danger of becoming fixed for life.

He was selling write-ups of Mary like hot cakes; there was no other word for it. He had written and sent out three write-ups — an unprecedented number about a single person — and now he had sold two of them already. He had hoped to plant, say, one write-up among the weeklies — to get quick results — and now he had planted two in the weeklies. Moreover, the third write-up had been in the hands of a famous weekly for ten days now.

That he had managed it all with remarkable adroitness, the young man could not conceal from himself. Cunningly enough, he had based all the write-ups on the fact that Mary Wing, at thirty, had risen almost to the top of a large city school system, where no woman had ever risen before. For that made Mary a public figure; that justified the write-ups. But, the bait thus thrown, he had given to each eulogy a

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special character and thesis of its own, always with an eye to local effects. This piece here, for example, which "Willcox's Weekly" found so extremely interesting and entertaining, concerned Mary the Freewoman, and touched delicately yet with vigor upon her late persecution for righteousness' sake. And this piece, the most personal and the best of the lot, alone bore the signature of Charles King Garrott. He had got Hartwell to sign one, Elsie White Story, President of the State Equal Suffrage League, to sign another. And only yesterday, Mrs. Story had telephoned that *her* piece (Mary the "Feminist" — only you may be sure Charles had not used that horrible word) had been gobbled up by the "Saturday Review," and sent around the "Review's" delightful letter.

So Charles could recall Mary's hard saying, that day at the High School, with a sense of triumph now. She, who had said he could n't help her, had rather overlooked this gift he had, his power and his art. Unquestionably, the thing was going to break big: she would have the surprise of her life. . . .

"Great heavens! *How I can write!*" suddenly exulted the young man, throwing out his arms. "I'll beat 'em all some day!"

Upon which, exactly as at a cue in a play, the door from the bedroom opened, slowly and quietly. And there stood Judge Blenso in the crack, a flat package in his hand.

Between uncle and nephew there passed a long stare. The uncle began to turn a little pale. But it was the nephew who spoke first, nervously and yet expectantly too:—

"Prepare yourself, Charles, my dear fellow! I much fear it's 'Bandwomen'!"

It was a long time before he was alone again.

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There were moments in every writer's life, of course, when he was obliged to wish frankly that he did n't have to have a secretary. What a writer most wanted at times was solitude, just a chance to sit quietly and think things over.

A great while Judge Blenso had pottered about under his little red "Nothing But Business, Please" sign. Now he was posting elaborate entries in his secretary's book, now he sang sweetly to himself over wrapping-paper, paste, and twine. For if his sedentary employer's failure to blow up, this time, had momentarily nonplussed the Judge, the sight of the letter from "Willcox's Weekly" had raised him to the highest spirits again at once. That distant people, entire strangers, were actually proving willing to exchange real money for words written by Charles there, and typed by him, Judge Blenso, — here was a delightful thing, full of novelty and promise. And nothing would do, of course, but that he must start the rejected novel out upon another journey to New York without loss of a moment's time. Business *before* pleasure, rain *or* shine. That was *his* way.

But he went at last, to make his toilet for the express-office. And Charles, alone, sat taking stock, with no more exultation.

Blank and Finney's letter had proved to be twin-sister to the remembered letter from Willcox Brothers Company. That is to say, it was rejection, flat and unqualified. But this time, after the first shock, Charles had perceived that he did not seem to be much surprised. It appeared that his expectation of the old novel had, after all, died violently on that other day. It was almost as if he himself had come to despise the old novel, because the publishers despised it — as if that were any reason . . .

From the mantel he had plucked a thick ledger entitled (on a neatly typed label), THE RECORD. This ledger was the

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great work of Judge Blenso's life, and large enough for twenty authors. Here the Judge set down, with much pains and a striking assortment of colored inks, the detailed progress of each of Charles's manuscripts: "When Finished," "When Sent Out," "Where Sent," "Editor's Decision," "Editor's Comments if Any," "Remarks," etc. On these pages, the essential part of "Bondwomen's" career (officially known as Entry 2) was thus recorded: —

	<i>Decision.</i>	<i>Comments if Any.</i>
1. Willcox Brothers Company	Adverse.	Declined for financial rea- sons.
2. Blank and Finney	do.	do.

The Record now showed nine entries, including the novel. Entry 1 was "The Truth About Jennie," which the Judge had insisted on posting in, to give a tone of success to his work at the outset. Entries 3, 4, 5, and 6 were short stories; Entries 7, 8, and 9, the write-ups of Mary. The pages devoted to the write-ups made, as we know, stimulating reading, but with the fiction entries the case was otherwise. Here under "Comments if Any," the words "See printed form, on file," appeared with monotonous, indeed sickening, regularity. The Record did show, indeed, that the "Universal," in rejecting Entry 5, — "When Amy Left Home," — had written a personal letter furnishing the Judge with this "Comment": "Excellently written, but claimed unsuited to his present needs. Let him hear from us again." Otherwise, rejection was unmitigated.

A scant showing for the work of four years, look at it how you would. One examining these coldly dispassionate annals would probably say, offhand, that there was but one form of

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writing Charles King Garrott was qualified to do: that was the write-up form. He had just read his two letters again, his acceptance and his rejection, side by side. Unusual and peculiar it seemed that the only writing he had sold for money, since "Jennie," was this series of articles designed to bring fame to Mary Wing. Of course, as far as that went, a man would like a little fame for himself, now and then. . . .

"Why, I'm a fool to think I can write!" groaned the young man, suddenly. "I'm wasting my life! I ought to be carrying bricks up a ladder."

His fall from complacency was, indeed, complete. However, every writer knows these little ups and downs. It may be, that Charles did not believe his bitter words, even then. And now his secretary reëntered, checking thought.

"Well! Now for the express!"

Judge Blenso wore a new English mackintosh and an olive felt hat, rakishly turned up in front. No board of social investigators could have commended him for spending virtually all his wage upon his back; but the results seemed always to justify him none the less.

"And, my dear fellow! — you should n't worry, as the expression goes! 'Bandwomen' 's a charmin' novel, a charmin' sweet love-story, and James Potter Sons'll be sure to take it — gad, by the first mail!"

Having seen it with his own eyes in Willcoxes' famous letter, the Judge was now finally convinced that "Bandwomen" was the correct title of Entry 2, just as he had said in the beginning. Further argument being useless, the young man returned a vague reply.

"And there's that other idea of mine, too," said the Judge genially, halting with his package under his arm — "bringing your sketches of Miss Wing out in book form! Put in Entry 1,

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too, 'Jennie's Truth,' if we liked — make a regular holiday giftbook! Gad, you know, Miss Wing's little pupils at the school would give us a whackin' sale!"

He went out blithe upon his duty. After an interval, the adoring voice of Mrs. Herman floated up, beseeching him to put on his ar'tics.

At the Studio table Charles sat, struggling to get down to work. He had put away The Record, put away embittered thoughts. But he did not get down to work with much success all the same, the reason being that his great Subject, unluckily, was no longer clear in his mind.

From the table-drawer he had produced a stack of manuscript, an inch high; and now he sat, not reading it, but merely disapproving it *en masse*. The stack was his premature effort to begin, really to begin his new novel — six chapters of the new novel written, fifteen thousand words. Launching upon this draft an hour after he finished Mary the Freewoman, he had pushed on, night after night, at first with confident rapidity. Latterly, he had become conscious of an increasing sense of resistance. And now he knew that all this was mere waste stuff, accomplishing nothing but to show him what not to write.

Well, but what to write then? What did he really want to say? It was absurd; but he did not know. It really seemed that he saw too much to settle, with enthusiasm, upon anything. By constant accessions of fresh understanding, his centre of balance, his novel's chief prerequisite, was kept in a continuous state of flux. . . .

Of "material" on the Unrest, Charles possessed a superfluity; of "plots," of "significant characters" and "illustrative incidents," his head was fuller than his pencil would ever write. His problem, of course, had always been for the fixed point of view and the moral "line." No longer could he

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be satisfied with that crude, simple line which had contented him in his first book, which still contented the other fellows: the line which "proved," as *Lily Stender* proved, that economic independence was the automatic salvation of women. He knew that was n't the whole story now. As for writing a book to show that Woman's Place was the Home, of course that had never crossed his mind, even when most strongly gripped by conservative reactions. His quest was for a framework which should develop conflicting values on a far finer scale.

Of course, what he should have liked to show was a wholly admirable woman: one who combined all the sane competence and human worth of the best new women, with the soft faculty for supplying beauty and charm of her old-fashioned sister. But that day in Mary's office had left him with the honest suspicion that such a goddess did not exist, and could n't. From the other direction also, as noted, his delicate scales had been joggled, with unsettling literary effects. The too hasty manuscript on the writing-table by no means followed the "line" the author had first plotted, prior to his meditations in the Green Park, after the bridge-party. No, in this draft the Home-Maker was married and had three children in Chapter One. Through all, the desire to rebuke the egoism of the day had persisted, as clearly the point of view most inviting to him, fullest of possibilities. And now Miss Trevenna, in some way, had disturbed and unsettled him there too. . . .

The rain beat against the Studio windows. The green-shaded lamp burned dully on the author's table. Big Bill, without surcease, ticked off the author's minutes. Charles rubbed the bridge of his nose, pondering deeply. Just now, as he turned the pages of his private book — where the essay form had long since been abandoned, where appeared the most surprising vacillations of authoritative opinion — he

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had made a somewhat striking discovery. It had suddenly come upon him that "Notes on Women" had, gradually but distinctly, dwindled down into "Notes on Mary," "Notes on Angela Flower," and "Notes on Flora Trevenna." In short, it appeared that, in the most unconscious way, he had been seeking to extract his "line" from his own story, as it were, from "life."

The discovery came upon the young man as most arresting and significant.

"And I don't know where I stand, that's just the trouble! I ought to wait awhile," he thought, aloud. "See how it all works out. . . . Things 'll be turning up. . . ."

On which — once more — Judge Blenso's picturesque head came sticking through the Studio door, and Judge Blenso's rich voice said, officially: —

"Young gentleman here with a letter, Mr. Garrott. Admit him?"

Returning to actuality with a slight start, Charles replied, "Admit him — certainly!" A day for letters, indeed!

Forthwith, the Judge standing aside, the young gentleman stepped into the Studio. A grave-looking young gentleman he proved to be, of some sixteen years, perhaps, with a dome-like forehead, a resolute mouth, and thick spectacles. He entered in silence, in silence held out the missive referred to.

"Good-evening," said Charles. "Thank you. This comes from — ?"

"My sister, Angela Flower."

The young man's heart seemed to drop a little.

"Ah, yes! And — ah — is there — an answer? —"

"I'll wait and see," said Wallie Flower, following instructions, in a deep, calm voice.

"Ah, yes. Sit down a moment, won't you?"

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He essayed a bright negligence which he was far from feeling: this thing had come suddenly. No amount of scientific argument, no recollection of sharp rebukes received, had ever convinced Charles that he had cut a fine figure in the affair on the sofa. Indeed, the very ease with which he had avoided all further consequences of his Rash Act, by the purely mechanical device of street-cars, had deepened, rather than diminished his consciousness of obligations unfulfilled, of caddishness, in short. To salute a girl tenderly after her bridge-party, and then never go within a mile of her again — well, that *was* a little crude, say what you would.

Hence Mr. Garrott, opening Angela's envelope with the blurred "Mr.," anticipated bitter reproaches, anticipated being termed a brute again, and called on to be honorable without further delay. Hence again, as his eye leapt over the neat lines, and found only sweet forgiveness and generous friendliness, he felt a sudden upstarting of relief and gratitude. A more perfect note had never been written! Why, the charming girl was n't expecting anything of him at all!

Or, rather, nothing at all worth mentioning. On a second glance through the perfect note, the hypercritical young man did observe an expression or two not up to the general standard, perhaps. "I did not think it would be so long before I would see you again." "When you are not so busy, you must come in to see me." On the whole, it could be argued that it was rather a mistake to put those sentences in. Fine as the note was, it would have been a little finer still without them. Yet, under the circumstances, what more natural? And of course, as far as that went, he and the city traction system had the issue in their hands.

So Charles looked up buoyantly at the bearer of good tidings, to speak.

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The bearer, however, had clearly forgotten his presence. He had remained standing, three feet from the table-end, and was found to be gazing, in the most pointed manner, at the old Studio lamp. The grave face of Miss Angela's brother plainly expressed amusement, and a certain good-natured contempt.

"Hello!" said Charles, diverted. "Anything wrong there?"

Without turning, the boy answered with a small dry chuckle: "Yes. Pretty near everything."

"Well! I've noticed it has n't been burning well. Need a new mantel, I suppose —"

"New mantel won't do you any good long's your air-draft's choked that way."

"Oh! So that's the trouble, is it?"

"That's one of them. P'r'aps you like it that way?"

The proprietor of the lamp having disclaimed such a fancy, the strange lad said: "Well, I'll fix it for you, then. Sit steady."

He reached up an arm long as a monkey's, which shed drops of water on the writing-table, and the green glow suddenly faded out, leaving the Studio in total darkness.

Out of the Stygian gloom Charles said: "There's another light there. I'll —"

"I know. Thought I might as well look into that one, too, while I'm at it. Just give your globe and chimney a minute to cool."

"Oh, of course! — certainly."

"Don't s'pose you want to stand a new mantel for the lamp?"

"I'm enough of a sport, but I fear there's not a new one in the house."

"Hold it for me, please," said the boy.

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A pinpoint of light had appeared in the blackness; it moved toward Charles's hand. He received the little searchlight, let it go out, hastily found and pushed the button again. And then Miss Angela's brother began to take his lamp all apart, cleaning it, blowing through it at unexpected places, and wiping the parts with a dark oily rag, which, luckily enough, he seemed to have in his coat-pocket.

The lad's single-mindedness, his un-selfconscious matter-of-factness had attracted Charles at sight. He recalled what Mary Wing had told him of Wallie Flower's struggles to get an education. Thus, as the light-repairing proceeded in the almost total darkness, a conversation grew up, at first largely question and answer. And the upshot of it was that Charles, as a tutor, offered to instruct Wallie Flower, free gratis, in German and English, the two college entrance subjects in which he was still somewhat deficient.

This odd development came at the end of the talk, when the illuminating power of both Charles's and the Judge's lights had been notably improved. When the brother understood that further education was being offered him for nothing, a gleam came suddenly into his oddly mature gaze.

He almost exclaimed: "Do you know German?"

"You might say I wrote it."

He pondered. "That means you do know it?"

"Like a member of the family."

"Do you teach nights?"

"I'm going to teach you nights."

And it was so arranged, the lessons to begin directly after Christmas. The boy became briefly embarrassed, boggling over his thanks. But Charles cut him short. "I'm doing it because I want to. That's the only reason I ever do anything."

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Relieved, Miss Angela's brother turned to the door, for all the world like one who had come to mend the lamps, and nothing else.

"By the way," said Charles, casually. "Thank your sister for her note, and say that I'll send an answer by mail."

He was left pleased with the interview, and with himself. In the generous gift of three hours a week to Angela's brother, he perceived something fitting and compensatory. If obligation existed — and it did, in a way — did not this discharge it, subtly and modernly? Kiss the sister on the sofa, tutor the brother in the Studio — what more fair or honorable than that?

One thing had rather struck him, of course — Wallie Flower's saying that he had hated to come away from Mitchellton. This, it seemed, had been chiefly due to Mr. Bush, the boy's science teacher at the Mitchellton Academy, whom Wallie clearly adored, whose eyebrows he had blown off in an experiment only last summer. As he had previously understood that both the Doctor and Mrs. Flower had also been attached to Mitchellton, it really appeared that Miss Angela was the only member of the family who had actually desired to make the move. And she had moved.

But this thought — like the hypercriticisms on the note — merely knocked at the door of the young man's mind and passed on. He felt himself warming anew toward this simple Type, with its charming friendly instincts and its sweet forgiveness of the stormy ways of men. On his return from his holiday, he resolved that he would give Angela some token of his regard more substantial than a note by mail: send her, say, with that book of hers, a costly box of appreciative blossoms.

XII

UNLIKE the ladies in the books, Angela, regrettably enough, did not get a "sheaf of letters" every morning. Mr. Garrott's answer to her note, which lay beside her breakfast-plate on the second day following, was, indeed, her only mail that week. Hence it was with feelings of excitement that she seized a table-fork and hastily slit the envelope.

Angela read: —

DEAR MISS FLOWER:

May I say how deeply I appreciate your note? And will you please believe that I have blamed myself entirely for what you so generously call our misunderstanding? While, of course, I must continue to blame myself, you cannot know how pleasant it is to be permitted to feel that you have forgiven me.

With the deepest appreciation, and all the good wishes of the season, believe me,

Yours sincerely,

CHARLES KING GARROTT.

It must be said of this note that it was the sort that puts its best foot foremost. First impressions of it were agreeable, but it did not wear. On the second reading, Angela perceived that, though as nice as possible, Mr. Garrott's reply said nothing about calling, which, in a manner of speaking, was the true subject of the correspondence. By the time she had read the reply half a dozen times, she found it flatly disappointing. Two days later, when she heard through Cousin Mary Wing that Mr. Garrott had gone to the country, not to return till after the New Year, she was conscious of a sudden and pervading hopelessness.

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The feeling applied, not to her principal friend alone, but to all the conditions of her life.

Angela understood, of course, that Mr. Garrott's remarkable offer to tutor Wallie for nothing was an attention to her, and a very handsome one. Still, it was not just the sort of attention that a young girl prizes most, perhaps; and in especial it did not meet the needs of this particular situation. To have a busy man-friend teaching German to your little brother on your account is very flattering, indeed; but it does not necessarily lead to the early clearing-up of a personal misunderstanding. That Mr. Garrott had been much worried by their misunderstanding, all along, Angela had known, by means of that womanly intuition of which we read so much; now his note said so, in so many words. But, manlike, he still did not see that, at heart, she was the same girl that had attracted him so in the beginning, and that if he would but call, she would make everything as it had been before.

How was she ever to see him again now?

At nineteen, youth accepts life's vicissitudes unquestioningly, but at twenty-five, a womanly woman (if still without a home, a husband and three curly-headed little children) has had time to whittle a number of observations to a fairly sharp point. Angela thought her situation a hard one, and it was. Wealth, influence, valuable connections — these aids were not for her. All the ordinary opportunities enjoyed by girls "in society," she lacked — in chief, opportunities of meeting people casually, as at parties, of seeing the same people again and again, under the most agreeable auspices. Her family simply failed to put her in a party position, as it might be called; in consequence of which, it came to this, that really her only meeting-place for the few people she knew was on the street, walking. And even at the best, of course, that

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method (by the mere laws of choice and chance) was most unsatisfactory.

Suppose that Mr. Garrott *had* been taking walks all the time, for instance, but, by reason of her having called him a brute, was choosing other streets — how was she to know? A city is a big place, and one young girl in a tight skirt cannot walk very fast or far, or cover a large amount of space in a given time.

"Marna" alone was outstanding; and it carried but the slenderest anticipations. Moreover, that question, all these depressing questions, were academic now, and would be for weeks to come. The little coterie had scattered far, and she had no means of filling the empty places.

There followed the dreariest days Angela had known since winter before last in Mitchellton.

"How can you *expect* anybody to notice us, mother?" she exclaimed, one day. "The family of a poor, obscure doctor, living in a *hut* on a back street, with not a living soul to help us! I think it's remarkable I accomplish as much as I do."

It was on this day, a cold Sunday afternoon shortly before Christmas, that the lonely girl carried out a good intention she had had in mind for some time. She wrote a long, intimate, sisterly letter to her favorite brother Tommy, who had got so far away since he married money in Pittsburg.

Angela had just come in from a freezing, eventless walk with Fanny Warder. (Fanny, who as Mrs. Flower said, had made a great success of her life, marrying at twenty, seemed to be on an indefinite "visit"; there was talk, of course.) Having first thawed her hands at her register, which was supposed to waft up heat from the stove in the dining-room below, but did n't particularly, Angela drew up her rocking-chair into the zone of ostensible warmth. She sat with one slender foot

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curled under her, by a trick that no man has ever mastered. And this time she had not searched for the formal tools of a note-writer, but employed a stub of a pencil and a pad upon her lifted knee.

"Dearest Tommy," wrote Angela, and followed with a solid paragraph of very affectionate greeting. She went on:—

Well, Tommy, I promised to write you how things were, after we got settled down. I must say the outlook is rather discouraging at times — and home is n't what it was as you remember it! Do you remember what fun we used to have even in Hunter's Run — driving in to "the balls" — and how fine it was in Mitchellton as long as you were there? Well, everything is *sadly* changed now! Wallie, I'm afraid, has n't improved as he gets older, he seems to rarely or never think of anybody but himself — and, of course, having fun is simply something he *does n't care for!* He shuts himself up in his room every night, making horrible mixtures in a "sink" he's put in — that smell up the whole house, and never *dreams* of contributing to the housekeeping expenses — though he's been raised now to *ten dollars a week!* Father is sadly changed, he gets quieter and quieter all the time.

Sometimes I'm really worried about him, he's so *indifferent!* He never jokes any more, and does n't try to get any patients, though I *know* he could get lots with his reputation. He seems despondent, Tommy, and sometimes does n't even come in for his office-hour — and the other day he lost a patient that way that the Finchmans sent, she waited half an hour and then went! But though he may have liked the country life better; and let us all *vegetate*; that can't be it — for he certainly made no objection when the family *consensus* seemed to be that we should move here! Of course, we have to face the fact that he and mother are n't very *congenial*, it is her problem, and while I would n't criticize mother for worlds and she certainly does her duty as wife and mother — I do think it's a *great mistake* for her to always make her attitude a sort of *reproach*, saying how "she's sacrificed herself to him" and all — you know what I mean —

Mother really gets along better than any of us — especially as I now do *all* the work of the entire house!

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The young writer paused, staring chillily at the register. She rarely looked out the window now, hers being the blank certainty that there would be nothing to see. Moreover, it was dusk. So, rising presently, she lighted the gas, and resumed her sad sisterly letter.

Of her mother she wrote in some detail: of the various friends of her girlhood she had renewed acquaintance with, and how she was always exchanging calls with Cousin This or Martha That, who was So-and-So before she married. To Angela, it had really seemed funny how all these connections of her mother's, whose social possibilities they had so often discussed before they left Mitchellton, had resolved themselves into dejected old ladies who had had unhappy marriages, and whose children had also had unhappy marriages, as a rule, or were in some other way unavailable as friends. Out of five families thus exhumed by Mrs. Flower, positively only one unattached young person had emerged, and this one, named Jennie Finchman (!), while certainly well-meaning, was a shy, anxious, painfully homely little thing who had never had a good time in her life, and gave all her pocket-money to a mission in the Dutch East Indies.

Well, Tommy [continued Angela], I've tried to give you a picture of the new home like I promised — and I only wish it was more encouraging! As for myself — the only outside person I had to help me was Cousin Mary Wing, and she is a "New Woman," as I wrote you in my Thanksgiving Day letter, and does n't go with anybody but *advanced older* people! — and, besides, she got into a terrible scrape, poor dear, and was dismissed from the school! Cousin Mary, it's only fair to say, has done more for me than anybody else, introducing me to her older woman friends — who have called on me, and several have invited me to teas, lectures, and etc.! But, of course, none of them were *social* people really, or at least of the younger set — and I practically have n't been invited to a single party, except "dove ones"! The one exception was a meeting of

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an "advanced club," where I met several attractive men, who have been as nice to me as you could *possibly expect*.

But the truth is, Tommy, money counts a great deal more here than it did in Mitchellton; all the girls who are prominent socially have wealthy families behind them! I think I would hold up the family end quite well on very little — but I have hardly a decent "rag to my back," my *clothes* let everybody know I am a person of *no importance*, so the little inner circle sees no reason to take me up, — mother and I have figured that with only *fifty dollars* I could get a really nice new suit, and a simple evening dress as well, — and perhaps hat and shoes, all of which I *sorely need*! But, of course, poor father simply has n't got such a sum, and Wallie puts all his in the bank — for college next year, he has \$240 there now! Tommy, you know I don't mean to accuse the family of being selfish, — father told us in advance that we would be poorer here, — but besides that — nobody in the family but you ever seemed to *understand* that a girl can't accomplish anything unless she is given some sort of a *chance*. Even mother does n't understand, she just thinks "things happen"! She is always telling how in *her* day men would work hard all day "superintending the farms" — and then at night ride twenty miles on horseback, to just talk for an hour to some girl of no special attractions! I can't make her see that men simply *are n't like that* any more.

The concluding paragraph of the letter merely described the writer's own daily round, especially touching on the dull walks, so rarely broken by a familiar face, which remained almost her only form of recreation. Here Angela decided to put in one sentence in a less reserved vein, which she did: "Well, Tommy, if you mean to make any thank-offerings to 'the poor' this Christmas, you know where they will be *most appreciated*!" But, as she loved her brother devotedly, it was also natural for her to return to a sweet and generous note in farewell: "For your sake, Tommy, I am glad you are n't here, with all the trials and hardships, but out in the world having a happy life of your own!"

The completion, stamping, and sending-off of the letter to

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Tommy left Angela with a sense of definite accomplishment. It was as if something pleasant had happened in the family at last, or at least was going to happen very soon. Unfortunately, however, this agreeable feeling, having such small relation to reality, was born but to sicken and die. Time proceeded with no pleasanter happenings than before, and a letter from Daniel Jenney, of Mitchellton — whose ring had caused the trouble — became a positive event.

By now, no doubt, the first natural excitement of "going to the city" to live had subsided. Enthusiastic anticipations had been rubbed bare by hard actuality, poverty, Finchmans, and so on. By this time also the young home-maker had systematized her housekeeping, as she herself said, and commonly ordered from butcher and grocer by means of Mrs. Doremus's telephone, three doors away. With experience, too, Angela had cut down the daily area of cleaning and polishing, from her first youthful excesses. Small incentive there was to rub your fingers to the bone on a house which was hopeless from the start, and which practically nobody but her mother's sad friends ever set foot in. Thus — and also through the all but eccentric indifference of the men of her family to beauty and charm — Angela had more time than ever for thinking. And the more she thought, the more clearly she saw that social progress in a strange city was solely a matter of what might be called favorable self-advertisement, and that this sort of advertisement, in her case at least, was solely a matter of just a little money.

But where was money to come from? Little could be expected from Tommy, even at the best. As for the housekeeping allowance (on which home-makers properly rely for some personal "pickings"), that held out, alas, yet frailer hopes. So closely had her father and mother calculated the budget,

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indeed, that in three months she had squeezed but five dollars and a half out of it: this, though she had early investigated the cheaper cuts of meat and learned the desirability of never paying cash.

"Oh," thought the girl, again and again, — "if father'd *only* get some patients!"

Mary Wing's pretty sitting-room had, indeed, established definitely in Angela's mind the close connection between money and work in an office. But, for the sound reasons explained by her to Cousin Mary, Angela could never consider work in an office as a possibility for herself. What, really, would become of the Home, while she went rushing daily to an office, to make money for her personal adornment? Besides, she could not but see that Cousin Mary was herself proof of the fact that going to an office had a very unfortunate effect upon a girl. Argue as you liked, the fact remained that, even in this so-called advanced age, the normal, sweet, attractive girls, the girls who were prominent socially, were never office-girls.

In short, how to get money without working for it? That, truly, was the great question confronting every nice girl, every womanly woman. . . .

To Angela, it gradually came to seem that nothing pleasant was ever to happen to her again. Not only that, but the pleasantest sort of things seemed to be happening all the time to everybody else.

Returning Mary Wing's call one day, in the hope of news (Cousin Mary's disgrace was being generously forgiven, now that the Badwoman had gone away), Angela picked up two items that depressed her curiously. One was that Donald Manford had got that position he was trying for in Wyoming: that meant that one member of the coterie would vanish for

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good within three months' time. The other item concerned a remarkable series of articles about Cousin Mary that were coming out in the magazines all of a sudden, and which Cousin Mary said were written by Mr. Garrott, though admitting that his name was n't signed to them. The Finchmans, whom Angela had met on the street, said, "How do you like having a celebrity for a cousin?" Cousin Mary, for her part, seemed to like being a celebrity immensely. Angela had never seen her in such high spirits; it really seemed in bad taste, considering the recent past. And, of course, Angela wondered a little if Mr. Garrott, the departed, would n't have written something about her, too, but for the misunderstanding.

A chance meeting with Mr. Tilletts, on the way home from this visit, hardly helped much. The seeking widower, afoot for once, had seemed hurried; he merely paused for a hasty word or two, and then was on his way again.

"Considering I have n't a soul to help me, I think I've done remarkably well," the girl protested once more, as if answering an inner voice, to her mother next day. "We've been here only a little while, and I have three men-friends already."

"Who is the third?" inquired Mrs. Flower.

When Angela mentioned Mr. Tilletts, her mother said, laconically: "He has never called."

"Men don't call any more, mother, I've said again and again! It's practically gone out."

Not feeling very well to-day, she lay in an old wrapper atop the sway-backed bed. Mrs. Flower sat, for company, by the outlooking window, dutifully stitching at a frilly "waist" which Angela had begun, but not finished. But her mother was a beautiful seamstress and really enjoyed an occasional task.

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"Besides," said Angela, listlessly making a dimple in her pretty cheek with the end of a bone-handled button-hook, "I think Mr. Tilletts will call. He specially asked to — only a little while ago."

Mrs. Flower, after a speaking silence, observed: "Donald Manford never sent you the post-card from Wyoming."

"Well — all the time in the world has n't passed yet, mother!"

"Your Cousin Ellie Finchman says he is deeply interested in this Miss Carson. She hears he has made her an offer."

"How could Mrs. Finchman possibly know that, mother? Besides, *I* don't care! I like Mr. *Tilletts* better than Mr. Manford!"

Coming to bloom in the age of Chivalry, Angela's mother had enjoyed a great deal of "attention" before she decided to bestow herself upon the worthy Doctor. Hence it was constitutional with her to take a belittling position toward less successful young women, including even her own daughter. Equally natural was it for Angela, with no such opportunities as her mother had had, to hold fast to what successes she had, and even, it may be, for memory to magnify them somewhat. And yet, in the freemasonry of women, she never resented her mother's coolly judicial summaries, and in this case, frankly felt the maternal slap to be justified. Really, Mr. Manford had never paid her any direct attentions, which perhaps had something or other to do with her admiring him so little as yet.

On this day, the lonely young girl's spirits seemed to touch their nadir. How *could* anything pleasant happen? There was no imaginable way.

"Oh, mother!" she exclaimed, with an exasperation rare to her. "Why, *why*, could n't you and father give us *one*

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relation that would help us? Did you ever *hear* of any poor people before that did n't have a *single* rich relation?"

Then she cried out: "Oh, *please* don't mention Mrs. Ashburton!"

It was surely the most natural, reasonable, and human complaint in the world. In family talk, it had an established standing, too, having first been formulated far back at Hunter's Run. But now it was as if Angela had flung her challenge in the teeth of fate once oftener than fate could stand.

On the very next day, in brief, the fairy godmother came rolling up to the door.

We read how it is always darkest just before the dawn. Angela, who knew that pleasant things rarely just happened, indoors, had gone out, so it was that she missed the direct distribution of gifts. But, as it chanced, she had been having her first really good time, since the earlier part of the bridge-party. In fact, on Washington Street, at about the same time and place, she had met Mr. Tilletts again; and now he was not hurried at all. It pleasantly developed that Mr. Tilletts's doctor had ordered him to stop riding around in his great car, and that henceforth he would be walking constantly. Moreover, the genial gallant, after a considerable promenade, had taken Angela to tea at Mrs. Hasseltine's famous shop, and, at parting — sure enough — made a provisional engagement to call "one evening this week." Altogether, the coterie seemed in a fair way to pick up a new member, after all.

Whether fascinating or overplump, Widower Tilletts unquestionably possessed the magic power, wielded by man alone, to restore the self-esteem of a neglected young girl. Angela opened the front door of home in a livelier humor than had been hers for weeks. And so entering, she found her mother standing in the hall, and heard at once tidings

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which, though not for her exactly, yet made her forget herself altogether.

Mrs. Ashburton had been, and gone. Mrs. Ashburton was going to send Wallie to college, at once. Mrs. Ashburton was going to give Wallie *five hundred dollars a year*, till he had got his education.

This oft-cited lady, at last the waver of the magic wand, was Mrs. Flower's first cousin. Close friends in their girlhood, their ways had long ago parted; and, since Dr. and Mrs. Flower's visit to New York in 1896, amenities between them had hardly gone beyond an exchange of cards at Christmas. But now it happened that Mrs. Ashburton, *en route* to a balmier clime than hers, had "broken her trip" here, after the frequent way of tourists, and, having duly viewed the sights of the city from a cab window through the morning, had bethought her to look up her resident kin. So the rich relation came to the little house on Center Street.

By chance, it was Saturday afternoon, and Wallie was alone in the house. It seemed that an experiment he had been working on for days had just turned out a failure, and he had opened all the windows and the front door by way of letting out the smell. But even then he did not see the lady standing on the steps, so intent was he on the large glass retort in his hand. His face was quite white, and beaded with perspiration. So Mrs. Ashburton had described it to Mrs. Flower, who came in to find her just leaving for hotel and train. She had asked: "What are you looking at that brown liquid so hard for?" "That's it; it's brown," Wallie had muttered, still without looking at her. "You mean it ought to have turned out white?" said she. "No, green," said Wallie, frowning and squinting. "Where'd the chlorine go to?" "Why do you care so much?" Mrs. Ashburton asked, more and more interested. "Why do

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I care?” he said, scornfully; and then, as if becoming conscious of her, personally, for the first time, he turned his spectacles on her and said calmly: “You would n’t understand, ma’am. A — a problem here . . . Well, I don’t understand it myself.” And then, losing her again, as it were, he actually endeavored to shut the door, with the lady outside. Mrs. Ashburton had had to push against it, she said, and put her foot in the crack, to attract his notice. “I’m your cousin — *your cousin!* — Mrs. Ashburton!” she cried. “And I want to come in and talk to you, please.” And this she had done, with the amazing result mentioned above.

Angela felt that the family tide had turned at last. She would scarcely have been human if it had not occurred to her how easily she might have been the one to be struck by the golden lightning; but such passing notions in no sense marred her sincere, though vicarious, joy over this great news. Moreover, it did seem, of course, that such a sum as five hundred dollars could not percolate into a family at any point without raising the whole level of prosperity very appreciably; and it was with whole-hearted happiness that she skipped upstairs to congratulate her lucky brother in the little bedroom she would not have to clean or “make” any more.

“Something *very* nice is going to happen to *me* soon, too!” she thought gayly, as she undressed that night. “I feel it in my bones!”

Her mind naturally slanted toward her favorite brother, with an intuitive increase of hopefulness. And, true enough, it was from generous Tommy that the more personal blessings presently came, though in a form that had not entered Angela’s dreams.

Tommy’s reply to her sisterly letter promised at first, indeed, to be as disappointing as Mr. Garrott’s had been,

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and for the same reason: it omitted the essential thing. Angela, having shaken the letter, and then shuffled the pages, early discovered that there was no thank-offering in it. Similarly, Tommy's sentences seemed to contain nothing more substantial than affectionate regrets: setting forth what a struggle he had trying to keep up with the set that Nina had always moved in; how he was five thousand dollars in debt now, getting deeper, and never had a nickel to jingle for himself, and that was the God's truth; how it had always been his dream to do something big for his sister, and certainly would do the same when old Mottesheard (Nina's father) died; how the old chap hung on in a way you would n't believe. . . .

Angela read with a certain sense of chill. Truly womanly, she, of course, never questioned the superior claims of wives. And yet it did seem a little hard that Tommy (who made a large salary as a bond salesman, or something like that) should lavish everything on a girl he had never heard of three years ago, while she, his own sister —

And then, turning into the fourth page, she came on a passage which checked all minor-key reflections instantly. In their place, rose and grew a startled astonishment. Tommy, noting what she had written about her long, dull walks, was offering to *give her an automobile*.

At first, Angela simply could not take in this offer as a solid reality. It sprang upon her like some wild, exciting joke. She read, with her breath coming faster and faster, and her soft eyes as big as saucers: —

Now, Sis, I know a car may strike you offhand as a good deal of an undertaking for a poor family, but you'd find it would n't prove so at all. The car I have in mind for you is a little simple one, that you could easily run and manage yourself. A man from the nearest garage will teach you how to drive it in an hour. There'd be no upkeep at all, with the easy city use you'd give it — practi-

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cally no expense of any kind but gasoline. The little car is old, of course, but still sound as a trivet, and it'll run till you would n't believe it on a gallon or so of juice. . . .

For a space the letter faded from the young girl's vision. Before her mind's eye flashed a series of entrancing pictures: pictures of herself, no longer the lone, slow pedestrian in a too large city. . . .

And don't think you would be depriving us [Tommy went on]. Nina *will* have a new car every year, and we've really had no use for this one for some time. By the by, did n't you tell me there was an old barn in your back-yard, or an alley? Why would n't that do for your garage? Then you would have your car ready at hand, without storage cost, and could take it out at a moment's notice and go for a spin with your friends.

Now think it over, Sis, and let me know if you want it. I can ship it at once, by prepaid express. Nina has a frank. . . .

"Oh, *mother!*" cried Angela excitedly. "Tommy wants to give me an automobile!"

The heads of the Flowers lifted from their breakfasts as if jerked by a common string.

When the breath-taking letter had been read again, aloud this time, there followed a family symposium, the question being whether or not Angela could have the automobile. To her surprise and delight, it appeared that there was really no question; all the family wanted her to take the automobile; all agreed with Tommy that it would not be a prohibitive undertaking. Mrs. Flower, an habitual conservative, pointed out that there would be nothing to lose in any case: if having the automobile proved impracticable, Angela could simply sell it. Wallie said that, if the automobile came before he left for college, he would teach Angela how to run it himself, thus eliminating the expense of a man from the garage. And, finally, her father astonished her by saying that he would

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find the necessary funds — estimated at ten dollars — for repairing the abandoned shed, which now leaked dangerously, into a serviceable little garage.

At nine-thirty o'clock that morning Angela rushed out of the house to the nearest telegraph office, to dispatch her happy reply. Excited though she was, however, she did not forget to count the words: —

Crazy	about	it	Tommy.	Arrangements	made.
What	kind	is	car?		

A. F.

Tommy's response came at bedtime: —

Car	started	to	you	this	afternoon.	It
is	a	Fordette.	Happy	New	Year.	

TOMMY.

The night before Wallie started North for college Angela went to him in his little bed-and-workroom and asked the temporary loan of seventy-five dollars. In the interval, she had learned that her father had a patient; it seemed, indeed, that he had had her for some time, only she was not an office patient, so nobody had known about her. Also, Angela anticipated that the housekeeping allowance would prove rather more squeezable now, with Wallie gone. Still, one cannot pass into the motor-car classes on a shoestring, of course; and Wallie, with his prodigal allowance and his handsome store in the bank, now literally rolled in wealth.

Brilliant prosperity, however, did not seem to have improved her little brother's character; he proved to be as reluctant as ever to "part." After a good deal of unworthy haggling, he agreed to lend Angela but fifty dollars, and actually entered the amount in a ridiculous little black book he kept for such things.

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The joke of it was that fifty dollars was really more than Angela had expected. She went out from the interview well pleased. Her resolve was to spend thirty dollars of Wallie's loan on a new suit, and keep all the rest for gasoline.

XIII

THEY had all cautioned her, her father, her brother, the nice man who sold the gasoline, to pick the quietest streets, and to go very slowly. So, from the alley-mouth, her safe progress had been by Gresham Street straight to peaceful Mason, where the traffic was so reassuringly light; and now, as she rolled securely out Mason Street, there began to dawn within her a first shy confidence. She went as slowly as her well-wishers had meant, at least; prudently close to the known haven of the sidewalk she kept at all times; now and then she stopped short, just to see if she could, and always she could. Through all, was the indescribable thrill of really doing it for herself now; lingering incredulity but gave a sharper savor to delight. And she was continually excited with the consciousness of large new possibilities here, of personal power in quite a new dimension.

It was possible to go on indefinitely out Mason Street, but at Olive (always a quiet thoroughfare) she was seized with a sudden adventurousness. She decided to turn up Olive, in short; not meaning to stop at the Wings', of course, but just thinking that if the Wings were looking out the window as she went by, it would be quite a pleasant thing. The enterprise, once conceived, was carried out with perfect technical success; but at the moment of passing the Wings', unluckily, an enormous ice-wagon came lumbering close by, riveting her attention, leaving her not so much as an eyelid to wink toward people's windows. Hence, she never knew whether the Wings were looking out or not. But her confidence waxed. At

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Center Street the rumble of a street-car warned her to stop a moment — just in time, too, for the car was hardly two blocks away — and when the car had passed, what must she do but roll boldly across the tracks and into the altogether unexplored regions beyond!

What prompted her to do this? Of course, the natural thing was to turn down Center Street a block and get straight back to quiet Mason, which had been duly tried and not found wanting. Afterward, she remembered distinctly that she had been on the point of doing just that. Was it the new adventurousness that beckoned her on, instead? Was it something yet subtler and more mysterious? At any rate, here she was pushing into a quarter of the city where she had never set foot in her life, where, in all human probability, her foot alone would never have brought her. And lo, she had not gone a block into the undiscovered country when a wonder befell, and with a little jump, all but a little cry, she saw the lost member of her coterie rise suddenly before her.

He had come round the unknown corner just ahead, and was walking straight toward her. She became aware of the beating of her heart. All this, it must be understood, was the very first time that Angela had taken out her Fordette alone.

Mr. Garrott was just off the train. Two hours in a day coach might have cramped his long legs; there might have been cinders down the back of his neck. Nevertheless, he advanced with an unmistakably lively tread, continually slapping his leg with a folded periodical of a size and shape like "Willcox's Weekly."

Nor was the coterie member's presence on the Wings' street mere blind chance, either. Those remarkable articles in the magazines about Cousin Mary, which had but popped as a

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rumor into one of Angela's ears and out the other, had naturally occupied a somewhat more prominent place in the thought of their creator. He remained, indeed, dazzled by the completeness of the write-ups' triumph.

Charles had stayed in the country four days longer than he had intended. And in his extended absence his whole mine of publicity had gone off with a brilliant suddenness that had startled him. The successful sale of the third write-up before he left town had assured a decisive *coup*, but the quick action the weeklies had given him went beyond all reason. He had not hoped that even the first of the write-ups could see print before the middle of the month, say; on the contrary, he had discovered the last and best of them — the one signed Charles King Garrott — on the train just now, in "Willcox's," for January 10th. In short, in the space of a Christmas holiday he, Charles, had spread the vindicating feats and features of his "demoted" friend to the four corners of the globe. Literally that, for did not the combined circulation of "Willcox's," the "Saturday Review," and "Hervey's National" exceed two million copies weekly (this on the word of the circulation managers themselves, a class of men whose consecration to the austere veracity has passed into proverb)? Surely there remained few literate persons in the world to-day who could plausibly pretend that they had never heard of Mary Wing.

And Mary (as Angela had noted) had appreciated these extraordinary services to the full. The letter she had written him in the country, after the appearance of the "Saturday Review" article, was uniquely grateful. A beautiful letter Charles had thought it; he had it in his inside pocket now. And the interesting thought it had raised was this: If his usually independent friend could be as grateful as that for

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the write-ups, what would she say when his whole plan worked out, and his Public Opinion had overwhelmed the School Board for her? Thus, on the train, after reading "Willcox's" piece three times, and now as he strode up the quiet back-street from the station, the author was intently plotting out the next, or practical, stage of his campaign, still unsuspected by her: the stage of the reprinting of the write-ups in the local papers, in fine, of repeated editorial endorsement of the same, of the outburst of letters from "Indignant Taxpayers," "High School Graduates," and "Old Subscribers" — practically all, of course, written by Uncle George Blenso and himself.

His thoughts proved increasingly stimulating to the home-come Charles. And when he came to Olive Street, he suddenly bethought him to turn up that way; not expecting to stop at the Wings', of course (for he had an engagement to call there this evening, much as if he had n't been a modern at all), but merely thinking that if he should happen to meet Mary it would be quite a pleasant thing. . . .

Having turned, the buoyant young man presently sent, as it were, a scouting eye on ahead. And it fell, not upon the friend he had made famous in a night, but upon an Object approaching.

The object was a conveyance, a little vehicle of the self-propelling type. It was an automobile, clearly; a runabout, you would have to term it, though certainly of a pattern adopted in no recent year. So steep and bobbed was this runabout's little body, so quaintly archaic its contour, that it stirred in the beholder dim recollections of the early days of the horseless age, of strange pictures seen in scientific magazines back in the nineties. Very slowly the little vehicle approached, but very loudly, too, with an increasing bias toward

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the sidewalk, with queer rumblings and groanings, with the oddest snorts.

Charles's puzzled eye lifted. And so it was that it encountered again the soft gaze that he had last seen misted in tears, upon a sofa. And so he heard the pretty voice, that had once referred to him as a brute, saying: —

"How do you do, Mr. Garrott! . . . I — I'm very glad to see you back!"

"Why — Miss *Flower*!"

Sheer surprise had halted him in his tracks, and the self-propelling runabout, which had been almost stationary all along, became entirely so, right at the curb.

"When did you get home?" Miss Flower was finishing, laughing, a becoming color in her cheeks.

"I'm just in — this minute! How are you? I — ah — did n't realize at all that it was you."

He had taken the small hand she offered, momentarily flustered, despite all effort, by the utterly sudden remeeting. He was aware that the girl looked a little conscious, too. But something in her gaze seemed to be trying to tell him that by-gones were by-gones now; and she went on with reassuring naturalness: —

"I hope you had a nice holiday? I've wanted very much to see you, and thank you myself. About Wallie, I mean — your offering to teach him —"

"Oh! — Why, *that*!"

"It was really the nicest thing. I — have n't seen you since, but you don't know how much I — we all appreciated —"

With recovered poise the young man easily brushed aside these thanks. "But I'm awfully glad," he added, "that he did n't wait for me, after all."

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "You *heard*, then?"

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He mentioned his letter from Mary Wing, causing her to say, "Oh," again. — "Was n't it *wonderful*! I knew you'd be interested . . ."

She was prettier than he remembered — or was it merely that the new hat (trimmed but yesterday) was more becoming than the old? — and her gaze, though not reproachful a bit, had for him a quality subtly appealing. Of the lives and loneliness of young womanly women — of that forced *waiting* which dams up all energies unused, and hangs the spirit to thrash about in a void, working over each small event to a towering importance — of such matters, a man, even Charles, the authority, knew only through the powers of his imagination. Charles did observe, however, that this girl seemed very glad to see him. And he felt that he now reciprocated these feelings.

"But," said he, with a hypocritically pleasant look at the vehicle, "Santa Claus seems to have remembered you, too! This is something new, is n't it?" said Charles, though feeling that new was hardly the word.

"Yes, — are n't you surprised? My brother in Pittsburg gave it to me. I've just learned to run it! It was so exciting!"

And then, in a pretty, hesitating way, she said: "Won't you let me drive you — home, or wherever you're going? I'd like to, so much. I — want so to tell you all the news."

He protested that he could not think of using Miss Flower as a taxicab. But when she urged it, in pleasing, ingenuous sentences, and explained that she was out only to drive about anywhere, for practice, it did not occur to him to maintain the churlish negative. And, indeed, this was exactly what he had desired from the moment of reading her perfect note last month — sweet reconciliation in just such a casual way, admitting or entailing next to nothing.

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So the returning author of the write-ups was to be seen carefully squeezing himself, and "Willcox's," into the seat of Tommy's delightful gift.

"Let's see — the engine's still going — is n't it?" said she, rather superfluously, it seemed, in view of the uproar. "Then I have to kick that and push this over. . . ."

As the girl said, so she did, her look a little anxious, her young face flushed with excitement. And, sure enough, the vehicle, of a self-propelling type, suddenly shook itself with a few loud snorts, and jumped forward with a jar.

"And what sort of car is this?" resumed Charles, dissembling intense curiosity as mere sympathetic interest.

"It is a Fordette," replied Angela, not without pride.

As they wobbled round the corner, narrowly missing the sidewalk, she added in the same proud manner: "And this is my very first drive by myself."

The taking of the corner (she explained that she could not turn round alone yet) meant that he was not going to pass the Wings', after all; but Charles hardly noticed that. He had himself to look to, in his somewhat unusual position. However, the drive to the Studio, though noisy, was very short; her completely feminine inefficiency as a driver, their snail's progress, could not extend it over many minutes; and the whole thing proved as easy and reproachless as could possibly have been wished. Light friendly talk was the note, flowing without embarrassment now. Angela told of the two great happenings in her family, seeming to count upon his interest, and getting it genuinely enough, too. He was glad, sincerely, that Luck had smiled on this girl, who had seemed to him not to be having much of a chance. But she was not one, even so, to take all the conversation to herself; it was a trait that he had noted, and liked, in her from the beginning.

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"Mr. Garrott," she said, at the first little pause, "are n't you going to have some stories out pretty soon now? You know you told me you were writing some — before you began your book?"

How gladly Mr. Garrott would have reported a little luck, too! But no, he was still known to Tables of Contents only as the author of write-ups. Somewhat ruefully, he explained to Angela his position about the editors; namely, that the sooner the lot of them came under the eye of a lunacy commission, the better for all concerned.

She became the comforter: "But perhaps they've accepted some of your stories while you were away so long!" He, however, knew that there was nothing in that.

"Well, no — no. You see, my — my relative who lives with me, Judge Blenso, looks after my mail when I'm away. And he's been sending me the casualty lists from time to time."

"But that story I liked so much — you told me a little about it one day — about Helena and her husband, don't you remember, who went off to the desert island —"

"Oh, that? That's been declined — yes, declined three times, if I remember rightly —"

"*Really!* But how *could* they! I should think they would have *jumped* at it! Why, I thought it was just wonderful . . ."

Her instinct for supplying charm was not amiss, it seemed.

"By the way," said the young author carelessly, as they curved into his own street, "have you happened to see this?"

And he not only showed Angela his "Willcox's," with the write-up in it, but bestowed it upon her, for her own. It developed that he had extra copies in his pocket.

Angela was very grateful for the magazine. Everything was

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as pleasant and friendly as possible. And at parting, she said, with only the slightest return of self-consciousness:—

“This has been a very short drive, Mr. Garrott! I hope we can have a real one some day soon.”

To that the young man, standing on the sidewalk before his own door, replied with a courteous generalization. Wariness was reflexive with him, so to say. But then, as he looked at the soft young face, he seemed to become suddenly conscious of the essential caddishness of his past behavior, and of yet another feeling, too, less coolly judicial. Had not the Kiss, in fact, set this girl somehow apart from others, remaining as a subtle bond after all?

Pressing her slender hand, he added: “Meanwhile, I’ve enjoyed this one very much! You’ve been — extremely good to me.”

“Willcox’s” had given Mary the Freewoman a fine spread. The write-up occupied all of one of its large pages, with three paragraphs “Continued on Page 49,” among the Men’s Ready to Wear Clothing. Out of the middle of the text, the best of the portraits supplied by Fanny Warder gazed back steadily at the two relatives in the Studio. The famous Mary was seated in a flowered armchair, and seemed just to have looked round over her shoulder. Her delicate, quite girlish, face wore her characteristic look of faint, grave interrogation; her eyes were intent and fine.

“Gad, you know!” said Judge Blenso, who had seen Charles’s name in print for the first time with an exclamation of pride and pleasure. “Why, it’s stunnin’, my dear fellow! Simply stunnin’!”

But the mind’s eye of Charles, looking down at the life-like presentment, was seeing that confident gaze averted; the

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ear of his fancy was hearing the low sounds of womanly emotion in this quarter at last. That, of course, was just after he had gently said to her — why, it might be next week! — “Do you remember telling me one day that I could n’t help you at all? Why, Miss Mary, did you really suppose I’d let you go on as a Grammar School teacher till *May!* . . . ”

“Bring ’em out as a holiday book — that’s what I say! Why, good gad, Charles! — we only got twenty dollars for that piece there!”

The young man laughed absently, and removed his overcoat. A glance at Big Bill showed that it was just four o’clock. He had examined the mail, heard the secretary’s unfavorable reports. The Studio, after nearly three weeks’ holiday, suggested the necessity of work undoubtedly; he was as far from settling upon his Line as ever. But it seemed that he did n’t feel like plotting scenarios to-day.

The “Post,” the “State,” the “Chronicle” — why should n’t he go down there now, get the thing started at once? . . .

“Oh, Judge, by the way! Do you know whether Miss McGee ever brought back that book I lent her? — fat red book, called ‘Marna’?”

“‘Marna,’ ‘Marna’? Never heard of it. Yes, that’s so, she did! Here it is!” said the Judge, and forthwith plucked Miss Angela’s long-kept loan from the bookcase close by.

“That’s it! Let’s lay it here on the mantel. Then maybe I’ll remember —”

“And borrowed a lot more, too!” exclaimed the Judge, suddenly laughing loud and long. “Gad, I lent her an armful, fact! — night we had the sleet-storm!”

“You did? — good! We’ll convince her we’re her true friends yet.”

His secretary, having gazed at him a moment with brilliant

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blankness, suddenly exclaimed: "Why, Charles, my dear fellow, you're looking like a fighting-cock! You must have put on a stone — fine! Here, let me feel your muscle!"

Charles tried to evade that ceremony, but it was, of course, no use. Having caught him going through certain setting-up exercises one night, and being misled by the light remark he let fall, Judge Blenso was irrevocably convinced that the sedentary Charles had an affair of honor on his hands. The night he made this discovery—the very night Charles secretly began the exercises, of course, the night of the day he had seen Mysinger on the street — the Judge had become almost dangerously excited, springing from bed and walking about a long time in his pajamas, saying over and over: "The old blood'll tell! Gad, you know! It's the old blood!" All attempts to explain, then and since, had been utterly without effect.

However, a knock on the door interrupted the proceedings, and Mrs. Herman came walking into the Studio — a dark, round, rosy little body, beetle-browed but beaming.

"Such a popular man I never saw!" said she, roguishly. "One lady meeting him and driving him up from the station, another calling him up before he's hardly arrived, and goodness knows who'll be next!"

"Why, who's calling me, Mrs. Herman?"

"It's Miss Wing! — waiting at the phone! And no wonder, with all you and the Judge have done for her, I'm sure! Judge, I hope you find your new chair comfortable?"

Having received the unexpected summons with a peculiar start of gladness, the young man descended the stairs with the most agreeable anticipations. To do a valuable service for a friend is, with some natures, to become fonder than ever of that friend; and Charles, from the moment of reading her

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unprecedented letter, was aware that his original services to Mary had distinctly had these sentimental reactions. (For of course such natures *are* sentimental, disgustingly so, and real Men — not to say realistic men — invariably hate and despise their friends, and speak to said friends at all only with a view to taking away their money or their wives.)

So, sitting down at the little telephone-table in the dark rear-hall, Charles smiled to himself and said, in a false voice: —

“Pardon me, but is this the famous Miss Wing, who —”

And Mary's voice seemed to spring toward him through the receiver, like an embrace: “Oh, *King Charles!*”

It was a little name she had made long ago by turning his first two names about, but reserved for rare occasions only. Rare also was it to hear this commonly contained voice so deeply stirred.

“Welcome home! I hope I did n't interrupt your work, but it seemed I could n't *wait!* And, of course, I have n't *half* thanked you yet, have n't begun to tell you how much — how much — I appreciate all you've done for me. . . .”

Once more, the fortunate Charles was brushing aside a lady's gratitude — rather generously, considering the infrequency of grounds of gratitude here. He laughed gaily into the receiver.

“The real point is, why under the sun did you connect me right away with the remarkable outburst of popular admiration? Hartwell went gossiping about, I suppose?”

“I did n't need Mr. Hartwell to tell me anything about that! But —”

“Aha! So Fanny told you about the photographs —”

“She never breathed a word —”

“Good-evening, Miss Holmes! — old Watson speaking! Will you kindly explain your —!”

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"Why, of course there was n't but one person on earth who could have done such a beautiful thing for me!"

All alone in the hall, Charles felt himself coloring with pleasure. However, the unwonted flush was not for long.

"I have to pinch myself," the girl's eager voice rushed on (did it sound just a thought more triumphant than even the author of the write-ups could have expected?), — "for every magazine I pick up is full of nothing but Me! I've just seen 'Willcox's' — oh, you don't know how much I liked that! You've simply taken my breath away! And then to come in and find *this!* — everything beautiful happening to me at once! I —"

"What? *More* honors, celebrity?"

"The greatest! — the most wonderful! Mr. Garrott, what do you suppose?"

Mr. Garrott hardly liked the slant the conversation was taking. The understanding was that whatever beautiful things happened to the Career were to happen exclusively through him now.

"Why! — I can't guess! Not — Has the School Board —"

"Pish for the School Board," cried the voice that was wont to be so calm. "You're talking to *the new Secretary of the League!*"

"I'm . . . *What?*"

"The person you're conversing with, if you please, is the General Secretary of the National League for Education Reform!" Her happy laugh rang on the wire: "Are you *staggered?* Well, I am, too! I simply can't begin to take it in . . ."

Had Mrs. Herman's house fallen about his ears, the young man at the telephone-table could, indeed, scarcely have been staggered more. His sense was of one falling headlong through

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space. He gripped the edge of the table with a large left hand, and for the instant there was no speech in him.

"I found the letter from Dr. Ames when I got in just now — oh, the nicest letter, explaining everything! And of course I wanted to tell you right away — you've been so good about wanting to help! Don't you remember, it was you who spoke of this as my brilliant revenge? We little thought then . . ."

Wanting to help! Doubt not, that was the body blow.

"No — no! And I — I really don't take it in — even now," he was saying, struggling desperately for his mask. "I — ah — I'd given up all — idea, you see! Why, I understood that was *all off!* I —"

"Of *course* — so had I! That's what makes it such a wonderful bolt from the blue! There was another candidate, you see — a college president, imagine! — and Dr. Ames says he felt he ought to be very discreet and reticent till it was all settled. But I was elected unanimously, and must be in New York to take charge of the office on March 1st. . . ."

It was the complete collapse of his triumph and his hope: he would not be going to the newspaper-offices now. But that sentence, that concrete date, took the whole matter deeper still. Charles Garrott took a firmer grip on Mrs. Herman's little table. Now his voice came firmer, too: —

"The first woman secretary they ever had! . . . Why — it's *immense!*"

In the ensuing dialogue, in which, for pride's sake, he sought to strike just the right felicitatory note, there was an instant when the possibility flashed upon him that the stunning event was itself but the unimagined by-product of the write-ups. The directors had decided not to give the distinguished post to an obscure provincial teacher, when all of a sudden his great broadside of fame for Mary had come roaring in among them.

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The thought, in this moment of utter frustration, seemed actually welcome to him. But it had hadly fluttered before Mary struck it dead, in the most incidental manner: incidental — since, to be just, she, having no knowledge whatever of his secret plans, could hardly guess what annihilation she was dealing out to them. It developed, in short, that her election, though held back a few days to be ratified by the trustees of the League's endowment fund, had actually taken place on December 27th. And it was too readily recalled that the first of the write-ups had not appeared till the following day.

"Yes — yes! . . . Fine holiday, thank you! — fine! But of course — no triumphs like this to report! . . ."

"Well! — I must n't keep you now, of course!" said the victorious voice. "I'm looking forward to seeing you . . ."

No, it was sufficiently clear that he had but labored to heap coals in Newcastle. It was just the case of the old write-up, last year; only now a thousand times worse. Often before, this desire in him to help, this spontaneous protecting instinct which seemed to be always flowing out here, had been rebuffed and defeated. But this time, his defeat seemed to be final. And, hanging up the receiver at last, the young man sat silent with the feeling that something valuable and important had suddenly departed from his life.

He felt that he had been rather imposed upon, but that did n't matter particularly. He felt beaten, as he had never been beaten before, and that seemed to matter a good deal. With an odd and profound sense of blank chagrin, he recognized, at last, that when Mary Wing had said that she did n't need his help, she had been merely stating a literal and obvious truth. How he had been such a fool as ever to think otherwise?

But deeper than all this, it seemed clear from the beginning that he was disappointed in his friend, personally. Had

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he not read into her all along, and put into the write-ups, a rather finer quality than she, in fact, possessed? Spinsters were entitled to a man's freedom to follow away their work — of course. But it seemed that he had never been able to imagine Mary as actually seizing this Right. And now, here she was doing it, with joy — the end of next month. Now behold her, whose praises he had so superfluously sung round the world — just an ordinary Redmantler after all, it seemed, exultantly striking off mother, home, friends; a female Egoist, no more, visibly engaged in "fiercely hacking away." . . .

He could, indeed, scarcely take it in. And stoutly he assured himself that his whole feeling about the matter would have been different — if only she had showed, at once, that this would be a wrench for her, that her thought was colored by a sense of values not connected with her Self. But no; it seemed that the new General Secretary had no thought to spare for the immaterial business of being a sister and being a daughter.

So Charles's call at the Wings' on the evening of his home-coming wore a complexion not contemplated by him when he had arranged the matter.

He had made this engagement, under the general misapprehension, in his reply to Mary's grateful letter last week. And now he had to keep it, however malapropos, resolved as he was that she should never sense any criticism or disapprobation in him. To seek to "influence" her, naturally never entered his mind. No, he was her casual spectator now and henceforward; he had dipped his oar in her affairs for the last time.

But the call was hardly much of a success, despite all efforts. Mary, having now had time to recapture her usual poise, no

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longer impressed one as being so unreservedly overjoyed with herself. It was noted that she kept referring to the write-ups, kept assuring him how delightful she found it to be a celebrity as well as a Secretary, etc., etc. The caller's intellect coldly gave her credit for "being very nice." However, no niceness could help much to drape the stark obtruding facts; no civilities seemed fitted to cope with the intangible wall suddenly sprung up in the old friendship. And if there had lingered in Charles's mind some revolting incredulity, some reactionary insistence that Mary could never really carry out the typical exploit of the Egoette, the talk this evening finally killed it. The famous educator's sentences made it clear, once and for all, that she was Leaving Home for good — for her own good, of course — on the 1st day of March succeeding.

Charles was determinedly "sincere" throughout the brief call, continuously and spuriously hearty. Inwardly, his resolve grew more and more fixed that this young woman, who was so rarely competent to Lead Her Own Life, should be permitted to lead it quite unassisted henceforth. For himself, he decided that his life should go to the unremitting service of pure Letters. But of such matters, of course, he permitted his agreeable chatter to yield no hint. Taking his departure upon a new wave of felicitations, he could but congratulate himself upon the trained adeptness of his mask.

And Mary, having shut the door upon her caller, stood leaning against it, her arched brows drawn together in a faint frown, her fine eyes faintly bewildered.

"Now what," she said, half aloud, "have I said or done, or left unsaid or undone, this time?"

And then she went slowly back to her mother's bedroom, where she found her mother with stockings to darn, and (taken unawares) her eyes a little red.

XIV

IN the Home on Center Street, the shrunken curtain was rarely hooked back on the nail now. And on the ledge of the little window that gazed toward the Blest, the shabby opera-glasses gathered dust.

As is perfectly understood, Careers in the making are the stuff to make conservatives of others. Observing Egoettes, an authority, if male, inevitably reacts, thinking better and better of the gentle business of supplying beauty and supplying charm. Charles Garrott, in short, having repudiated all connection with the life of Mary Wing, was in just the proper frame of mind to applaud the life of Mary's so different cousin. And Charles did applaud it — certainly. But, of course, such purely scientific endorsement did not controvert another established known truth, namely, that, under certain circumstances and as applied to certain individuals, the supply of the soft commodities referred to may very well prove a little in excess of the demand.

The well-known thought first flickered back into Charles's mind on the third day of his home-coming. At the moment, he stood on the corner nearest Berringer's, having just dismounted there from Miss Angela's conveyance. On the fifth day of his home-coming, at the same corner, his reflections on supply and demand were assuming an increasing definiteness.

"Well, then — good-bye!" he was saying, with his fatal pleasantness. "And thank you very much for the lift."

From the seat of Tommy's valuable donation, Angela was

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gazing up at him. And he saw that her face, which had been smiling, was touched with a brief seriousness.

"Oh, you know I've enjoyed it — so much! But — we never seem to have anything but these little bits of talks. I'm sorry. . . . Perhaps I'll see you to-morrow?"

"Ha! — quite likely! — yes! Thank you! Well! — *good-bye!*"

And he turned away toward luncheon and the good man-talk with a crescent uneasiness, having failed to point out — possibly failing to remember — that to-morrow was Saturday, and he would be off to the country again.

Day before yesterday, he had encountered the conveyance as he left the Demings' at one o'clock. To-day, he had overtaken it on his walk downtown — literally that, for he was a fast walker and a little absent-minded besides. Thus he had now enjoyed three peace-making drives with the girl he had once parted from forever, all in the course of his first five days at home. And now at the end of their third pleasant talk, particularly after these last prospective remarks of hers, Charles could not but feel that the true object of these re-meetings had been satisfactorily accomplished. Now the reconciliation was complete; now he felt no lingering shadow of doubt of his forgiveness for having once been a brute.

He did not regret the drives; he was very glad, indeed, to be good friends again; but his subtle instinct seemed to warn him that he and Angela would do best, would get along with the fewest misunderstandings, without a rapidly developing intimacy. And, taking the higher view, it clearly was not right, it was not moral, that a confirmed bachelor like himself should go on indefinitely monopolizing a nice young Spinster Home-Maker's time.

Returning to town on Monday, Charles, though in the

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kindest way, went to Berringer's by the Center Street car-line. He felt, indeed, that he was really looking out for the girl's higher good more than for his own: she lacked that competence to manage her own life, so harshly flaunted by others. All passed off well. On Tuesday he utilized the traction system again, with equally satisfying results. And then, on Tuesday afternoon, as he trod professionally from the old lady's who was studying French to Miss Grace Chorister's, he suddenly ran upon the Fordette again.

By an odd chance, the quaint little vehicle was standing still, directly in front of the Choristers'. His reconciled friend was out of it, standing by, bending well over the car, peering into it. Nevertheless, by some sixth sense, she saw him at once and, straightening up with a pleased smile, she waved and called: —

"Oh, Mr. Garrott! — how glad I am to see you! Do you know how to crank?"

He approached with the gallantest air, the most civil speeches. All the same, as he bent to his hard labor — for the Fordette proved dangerously stiff in the crank — and politely sought to explain how to avoid killing the engine for the future, he was conscious of a certain sense of rebellion. . . . Excellent, laudable, justifying things, beauty and charm; but the plain fact was that he, Charles, was simply not in the market for them at present, that was all.

The friendship, indeed, was well cemented now; the talk characterized with a growing confidence.

"Oh, how strong you are!" said Angela admiringly, as he finally got the old engine to spinning. "I do wish I could do it like that! Now you must let me pay you for your trouble! — won't you? I'm just driving around, really, so don't think —"

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"Oh, thank you, but I go in here. Business hours, you know! Well! Now you're —"

"Oh, is this where you teach every afternoon?" asked Angela, with interest, gazing past him at the handsome stone "front" of the Choristers'. "Oh, yes, Miss Chorister. . . . How long does the lesson last?"

"Oh, an hour — usually. But, of course," added the young man, his eye wavering slightly, "that depends somewhat — on circumstances —"

"You don't get out till about half-past four, then? I do *wish* you were n't so awfully busy! Mr. Garrott, have you been away again? I don't seem to have seen you at all for a good many days now."

"Yes! That's it! — been away again! I go away all the time — practically. And when I'm here, why, it's nothing but work, work, work, from morning to night, for me! It's a wonder to me I have a friend left, I have to be so horribly unsociable — *always*. But," continued Charles, "I'm glad I happened by in time to be of some help. By the by, had n't you better get in and try her out? I don't like to rush on to my lesson till I know you're all right."

"Yes, I suppose I had. I ought n't to stop you now."

His suggestion, indeed, had a striking reasonableness. Fortunately, the try-out proved quite successful, after only a little pushing and kicking. But the Fordette snorted from before the Choristers' very slowly, Angela looking back over her shoulder, smiling at him, a pretty and appealing look on her entirely feminine face.

Charles went up to his daily hour with Miss Grace, in a brown study.

Miss Grace, it must be known, was a Temporary Spinster, verging toward Permanence; she was round, gentle, blonde,

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by no means displeasing or ill-looking. Had the world been the normal place Old Tories took it to be, Miss Grace would undoubtedly have been one of those happy women who find themselves, at twenty-five, with a home, a husband, and three darling little curly-headed children; and there were a hundred signs that so she would have found full happiness indeed. But the world being not normal now, but, on the contrary, in Unrest, something remote had gone wrong with Miss Grace, parting her from her manifest destiny. Perhaps the panic of 1907 was to blame, or a decrease in the visible gold supply; perhaps the trouble was in that hard saying of the Redmanklers, that Love was going out. At any rate, here hung Miss Grace on the parent stem in Washington Street, a Waiting Woman: the non-understanding and unaccounted-for Anomaly in a disordered social system; an adult human being thirty-two years old, with nothing upon earth to do.

Miss Grace's subjects were Sociology and the History of the World. An agreeable soul herself, she noted that her tutor's manner this afternoon was taciturn and distrait. As he was concluding his remarks upon the thirty pages of Lester Ward that made her lesson, she noted that he lost his thread suddenly, and left a sentence permanently hanging in mid-air. Back into the tutor's head, in fact, the artless questionings of another had popped with arresting force: "*Is this where you teach every afternoon? You get out about half-past four?*" From taciturn, Mr. Garrott's manner became restless and rather irritable. And when the hour of four-thirty arrived, he did not snap his watch at Miss Grace and depart at once, according to his almost invariable habit. No, he moved in a novel manner, to the drawing-room window. And he stood there, oddly and irresolutely, gazing out, first up the street and then down.

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Why had he mentioned that the lesson lasted an hour usually? Why had n't he said, frankly, that it lasted till five or six o'clock, and often later?

Slowly but surely the idea was being established that it was the natural and usual thing for him and Angela to drive in the old Fordette every day. It was time for him definitely to break up this idea. Otherwise, what was to be the end of it all? — that was what he wanted to know. More and more he seemed to become aware of a gentle claim, an indescribable pressure, very soft, yet rather alarmingly sure. Why on earth could n't she be satisfied just to be pleasant friends once more? Why all this talk of future meetings, of seeing you again all the time?

Miss Grace stood some distance behind her tutor, observing his strange behavior. Somehow her attitude wore the air of a typical expression of character. Miss Grace had flutterings, as witness her growing knowledge of the Merovingians; she even pretended to nibble fearfully at her tutor's occasional exhortations, that she cease her parasiting and go to work. But beneath such vague symptoms of Unrest, it was clear that she remained as her tradition and environment had fixed her, a Woman of Romance: that is to say, a being gladly content to serve as the spectator and audience of Man.

"Mr. Garrott," she said suddenly, in her rather childlike voice, "I don't believe you are a bit busy this afternoon. You really must stay for tea. Nobody's coming in, sister's out, and you know you have n't stayed for perfect ages."

To her surprise, the unsocial tutor accepted at once. He remained with his pupil till quarter past five. Thereupon, he reached his Studio without interruption, entirely on foot.

Charles (thinking for the young girl's highest good) was rather pleased with this development. By accident, he seemed

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to have hit upon quite a satisfactory sort of *modus vivendi*: street-cars to Berringer's, and tea at Miss Grace's till dark. Next day he tried the programme again.

This time, it did not work out quite so well: the secret truth of the matter being that, at bottom, all Spinsters have certain well-defined points in common. That, in fact, is what makes them a class. And, speaking in the large, you may say that there is no such thing as a Permanent Spinster.

Lessons at the Choristers' took place in the library, a stately room, yet charming, too. Into it, a dusky maid wheeled a double-tiered tea-table, all mahogany and glass, silver and china atop, little cakes and small enticements on the deck below. Talk of historical matters ceased. There sprang up light prattle of the little things Miss Grace knew and liked best.

The tutor, basking by the fireside and waiting for night, was not unhappy. Though he frequently lectured Miss Grace, through long use he really liked her. Now, he was also consciously grateful for her haven from the too social life of Washington Street. That he could not go on taking tea with Miss Grace every day for the rest of his life he, of course, knew well; but he would just take each day's problems as he came to them. Meanwhile, this Spinster supplied a quiet charm. Her hands hovered ministeringly over the tea-table. For a plumpish woman, she had noticeably small hands, graceful and white. When the tutor made her a civil compliment, she colored like a school-girl.

Following the compliment there was a moment of fire-lit silence. And then Miss Grace's voice said softly and sweetly:

"You are looking at my ring. I'm wearing it —"

So that ended *that*.



THIS SPINSTER SUPPLIED A QUIET CHARM

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The tutor was on his feet so abruptly as to set the tea-things shaking.

"No! No, I was n't — I swear! I must go at once," said Charles.

Unaware of the painful memories her womanly words evoked, Miss Grace naturally looked very much surprised.

"But — *what's* the matter? Why, you act as if it were something improper for you to look at my ring!"

"Absurd," said the tutor, with a gesture.

He had merely remembered, all of a sudden, something very important he had to do, that was all. Pardon his haste, but he had already stayed too long, he feared.

Indifferent to Miss Grace's bewilderment, he left at once, wondering if voluntary celibacy could not exist, and be respected, upon this earth. And next day, as he stood on the corner of Center Street awaiting his good, safe street-car — indeed, as he was in the very act of boarding the said safe car — the little Fordette chugged up behind and nipped him.

It was a pure accident, and he knew it. But he saw at once that no accident could well have been less opportune. It involved a discovery highly prejudicial to his future.

Angela, indeed, had not even seen Mr. Garrott. She had merely perceived, rounding the corner into her own street, that she was about to run over somebody, and had awkwardly clapped on her brake, just in time. Recognizing her friend in the person she had so nearly bumped, she gave a little feminine cry of mirth and excitement; and, while she apologized and laughed over the strange coincidence, Charles's car, of course, suddenly clanged away and left him. The rest followed, as the night the day.

Almost the first thing she said was: "Oh, is *this* where you take the street-cars, when you have n't time to walk?"

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Charles's reply indicated that he was very erratic and uncertain in these matters, taking the cars now at one point, now again in a totally different quarter of the city.

So the two friends, no longer constrained by misunderstanding, started off on the slow mile drive to Berringer's. In the course of this drive, Charles had his first justifying thought of Mary Wing in ten days.

He recognized, with deep misgivings, that this girl's attitude toward him was wholly ingenuous and natural, the "claim" he complained of but the spontaneous expression of her girlish conception of their relations. That, of course, was just the worst of it; in that naïveté (oh, surely this was the Naïve Sex!) was her soft strength. He, with his cursed weak politeness, knew not how to withstand her maidenly theory; she, on the other hand, had new means of putting it forward constantly. All was changed, he saw now clearly, from the instant when she came riding back into his life at the wheel of the ancient Fordette.

How was he to have any privacy of movement henceforward; how get from place to place?

Beside him, the girl was talking, with simple pleasure, of bridge. It appeared that she was thinking of having another party next week, in honor of Cousin Mary. Mr. Tilletts was very anxious to improve his game, she mentioned.

"And I think I'll invite you too," she said, with becoming coquetry — "even though you've never paid your party-call — for the other one!"

But why was n't she sometimes at home, home-making? That was what he should like to know.

And aloud, he spoke with hard brightness of the weather.

Through her seemingly incessant practice, Angela drove better now; not efficiently or rapidly, but no longer with her

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first anxious air, stopping short when she saw a wagon a block away. This left her more freedom and enterprise for conversation. Mr. Garrott's meteorological comments soon petered out. Subtly, gently, her manner seemed to reprove him for wasting their time, as it were, on trivialities.

She said presently: "Did you ever read that book I lent you, Mr. Garrott — 'Marna'?"

The young man groaned inwardly. He could not understand why he had not returned the book last week as he had intended — with or without the blossoms — instead of dilly-dallying along this way, till some point was made of it. True enough, Angela interrupted his loquacious apologies: —

"Oh, it is n't that! I really don't want the book at all. But —"

She drove a few feet farther — an appreciable interval at four miles an hour — and ended, rather wistfully: —

"I wondered if you were n't keeping it — for another reason. I mean — just because you did n't want to come to return it."

"Why, what an idea! Ridiculous! —"

"Mr. Garrott, you know you *have* seemed to — since —"

"You've no idea how overworked I am these days — never a minute to call my own! Why, there's your cousin, Mary Wing, — one of my best friends, — and I have n't so much as laid eyes on her — but once — since 'way before Christmas! Think of it! And that's —"

"You used to be willing to take a *little* time for pleasure," said Angela, looking away from him, "before — we had that awful misunderstanding."

"It gets worse and worse all the time!" said Charles, hastily. "That's what I say! That's writing! — yes, indeed! — inexorable — once let it into your life, and it eats it all up —"

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forcing a man to be a — a hermit for life, you might say. But there was something I was very anxious to tell you, Miss Flower. Let me see . . . slipped me for the moment. Ah — oh, yes! — did you know Donald Manford's back again?"

"Oh! No, is he? I had n't heard."

"Yes, old Donald got back Sunday, full of pride and honors. . . ."

And then into the eyes of the worried young man there shot a faint gleam.

He had mentioned Donald absolutely at random, but the moment he heard the youth's name on the air, an idea exploded in his brain, leaving behind a dull hope. Unlike himself, Donald was a marrying man. Why, when you stopped to think of it, was n't Angela the very girl for him? And why, then, should n't he, Charles, frankly reversing his purposes at the Helen Carson luncheon last month, bring together once more these two nice, simple cousins of the too-modern Mary, just as he had done that night at the Redmantle Club, when all the trouble had begun?

Of course, at the moment, Charles's "psychology" was not quite so elaborate as this. The thought, indeed, flashed through his brain in purely concrete form, thus: "*That's it! I'll put her on to Donald.*"

Forthwith, he launched upon a voluble talk, an address, at once extolling Donald's character and throwing out suggestive commentaries upon it: how Donald had come home in the vein of a boy let out of school, seeming to feel that at last his playtime had come; how he (so different from himself, Charles) openly sought and hungered for pleasure now, was mad for some good times. And, observing closely, he thought that Miss Angela looked interested in his exposition, too, though hardly so interested as one might have liked, perhaps.

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"Why, I did n't think he was that sort of person at all," said she.

"I've never seen a man change so — come out so — in my life! Landing this great job, you know! — it's taken a great weight off him. And then the thought that he has only a few weeks more at home, too — it's really revolutionized his character! Why, Miss Flower, the man's all but quit work! Really! He . . ."

A knocking sense of disloyalty — to Mary's known plans — checked him, but briefly. What was that to him now? Had not Mary convinced him, once and for all, that she was more than competent to manage her own affairs? Deliberately, the young man released his valuable information: —

"Why, he leaves his office every afternoon at four o'clock — rain or shine — and walks up Washington Street, absolutely hunting for somebody to come and give him a little fun! But who is there to do it? He's been out of things so long, he hardly knows anybody! And then, too, Donald, beneath that — ah — standoffish manner of his, is really a shy man. What he needs most, really, is encouragement. . . ."

To all of which Angela's final reply — delivered after a slight silence — was: "You seem to love to talk about Mr. Manford to-day, Mr. Garrott." And then she took the wind out of his sails completely by saying: —

"I don't think of Mr. Manford really as a friend of mine. You know — I often think you're the only real friend I've made, since we left Mitchellton."

During the remainder of the drive, Charles thought it best to affect an amiable absent silence. But that gained him nothing, any more than his treachery to Donald and Miss Carson. Before she released him at the now too familiar corner near Berringer's, the girl said, simply and seriously: —

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"Mr. Garrott — are n't you really *ever* coming to see me again?"

Why again? When had he ever been to see her? And why all this talk of a misunderstanding? *He* had never misunderstood anything.

"Why, yes! — yes, certainly! — when I ever find a minute to see anybody! Ha, ha! But — when that'll be —"

It was her great merit in his eyes that she had never really reproached him. It seemed to cost her an effort to go on: —

"You've never forgiven me for — for saying what I did that night. You know you have n't! But if you'd ever come to see me — so that we could really have a talk — I feel I could make you understand that I — never really meant it!"

The maiden's gaze at once embarrassed and vastly depressed him. In it he read, as if spread upon a bill-board, her soft certainty that, though he himself might not realize it yet, he was her man. . . .

In the restaurant, the four or five entirely masculine persons with whom Charles commonly lunched took note of his peculiar gloom. It was their whim to assume that a valued pupil had just discharged Charles without a character. Theirs was a crude and noisy wit. But the tutor ignored, hardly heard, their gibes. He sat withdrawn and silent over his chicken hash (for which Berringer had no less than fourteen different names). And before his fascinated mind's eye there unrolled an endless vista of driving duets, with the gentle feminine pressure closing down ever more and more irresistibly upon him.

What to do, what to do? That was the question. There did not seem to be a corner of the city now where the Fordette did not go poking its ugly mug.

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All very well to say: Be bold, be cold. Refuse under any conditions to get into the Fordette. That, to him, was simply not a possible line of conduct. Inability to be successfully rude to people, even under the most favorable circumstances, had long been recognized as the damnable flaw in his character. And as to this very peculiar case — how could the roughest boor, the most thoroughgoing cad, repel and affront a nice young girl whom he voluntarily kissed but last month — one whose only fault, after all, was a fatal constancy?

Now he fairly confronted the two distinct and fundamental weaknesses in his position: the moral and the mechanical, the Kiss and the Fordette. A just thinker always, he would not deny, even now, that it was his own free-will act that had first altered everything. If he took the ground that he had kissed, with warmth, a girl he cared nothing on earth about, what sort of person did that make him? No better than a Frenchman, daft about *La Femme*. She, it could not be gain-said, really paid him a finer compliment, took the nobler view of him, when she assumed that those salutes had signified something. She was not without right to her naïve confidence. And now that she had this maidenly expectancy firmly mounted upon a gasoline engine — do what he would, he could not escape a ripening affection. She would get a call out of him yet. There would be another bridge-party, and he would be at it. And after the bridge-party. . . .

Alone with his thoughts among his noisy companions, Charles drew a handkerchief across his brow. A Home was, indeed, a sweet and beautiful thing. But the positive fact was that he, Charles, did NOT want one made for him at present. And still, the soft advance that leads straight to Homes pressed resistlessly on.

Great Heavens, what a price to pay for one little kiss on a

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sofa! . . . Well, two or three little bits of kisses, then. What a price! What was the reason of it, where the justice?

He spoke aloud, for almost the first time at his lunch, with sudden heat: "I believe I'll move away from this town!"

The remark elicited a shout of laughter. In the midst of it, the tutor rose and stalked intently away. It had just occurred to him that he might force a quarrel on Angela, on some trivial pretext: pretend that she had hurt his feelings in some way — about not returning that book of hers, perhaps — something like that. The old dodge: a million men must have worked it. But even as he dallied with the notion, Charles knew very well that the ruthless strength was not in him. Besides, his thought now had taken a cold retrospective turn, interesting in its way: the sight of Talbott Maxon, grinning there, had roused old associations in him. Talbott was a good one to laugh! But the Oldmixon girls had had him laughing out of the other corner of his mouth.

How had he ever lost sight of *that* little affair?

People like G. B. Shaw might go about pretending that they had invented the idea of Woman the Pursuer. But the fact was that he, Charles, had personally discovered the elementary truth before he was out of his teens. Experience, you would have said, had driven it home unforgettably. All the way up to the old lady's who was studying French, tucked away in an obscure corner of the street-car, Charles was soberly going back over the instructive time he and Talbott had had with a group of Temporary Spinsters — all of five years ago — and wondering how under the sun he had ever allowed its lessons to grow dim.

That old trouble had started casually, too — how sharply it all came back now! At a dance it was, when Talbott, who

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was also fatally kind-hearted (and was pushed by a chaperon from behind, besides), had invited Susie Oldmixon to abandon the wall for the waltz. Of course, he had been stuck for four dances for his pains: of course Miss Oldmixon — a womanly girl — had misconceived the character of that long set-to; of course she invited him to a party in a day or two. Then it was that Talbott, sensing how things were going, had introduced him, Charles, much as a cowardly conscript offers a substitute. But the base act had gained him nothing; the Oldmixons produced a friend of theirs, Sarah Freed, — how he came to loathe the sight of Sarah! — and upon the instant, he and Talbott found themselves caught up together in a literally endless chain of little engagements, usually thus: a party, a party-call, another party, etc. Naturally, they had early had the bright thought of breaking the chain by not paying any party-call; and at once, this very same kind of soft pressure was put upon their weak chivalrousness: "Ethel thinks you must be mad with her," one or the other of the loyal sisters would say. "You know you've never paid your party-call." If they yielded, and went and paid their party-call, it was not considered that they had then discharged their duty like soldiers; no, by an inexplicable shift in the point of view, the call was straightway viewed as a personal "attention," and they were at once invited to another party. So it went: these girls had reduced to an intuitive science the feminine instinct for making one thing lead to another. Of course they were always offering to teach him and Talbott something, as auction or the Boston; always trying to lend them something — like "Marna" — which would have to be returned. And even if all the regulation pitfalls were fairly side-stepped, it really accomplished nothing, for in that case Sarah or the Oldmixons were sure to have a Visitor. Even Sarah Freed, of course, rather hesitated

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to ring you up on the telephone and say: "Please, please, come to see me! You know I have n't a thing in the world to do but sit and think about men, and you're the only man who has spoken politely to me since 1908." But none of the virgins minded at all ringing you up and saying, "Do come to see my Visitor."

The worst thing in it all (reflected Charles, with worryment, in the street-car) was that Sarah and the Oldmixons were far from being brazen hussies; they were really nice girls, only sharpened a little by tedium and the creeping fear of "failure." Odd though it seemed, they actually remained almost completely unconscious of their own processes. And still it had taken him and Talbott nearly a year to get out of the soft vicious circle; and still he remembered distinctly that they had then agreed upon the following as their invariable rule of conduct, thenceforward: Never be polite to a womanly girl, unless positive you want to marry her.

A year! And of course he had never kissed Sarah and the Oldmixons, either. . . .

Charles went on his rounds in a humor of fatalistic despondence. The mood proved premature, decidedly: while there is life, there is hope. And it seemed that he, by too much thinking, had wrongly discounted the promising aspects of his case. He had builded rather better than he knew.

When his lesson with Miss Grace was over, at four-thirty that afternoon, the tutor said gloomily: —

"I can't stay for tea to-day. But I think I'll just stand here, and look out of the window a little while."

Of course, after yesterday, there could be no more tea-taking. Equally of course, caution was more needed than ever. "Don't wait for me," muttered Charles, reconnoitering, to Miss Grace. And then he forgot her entirely as his eye, shoot-

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ing out the window, fell upon Donald Manford sauntering carelessly along, over the sunny street.

From the Choristers' window, Charles gazed out at his young friend with moroseness and moody envy. What he had told Angela about this youth was (by chance) almost literally true. Donald — hitherto a hard worker, through Mary Wing's unceasing influence — *was* visibly relaxing the ties he was so soon to sever; he *had* come home in distinctly a holiday humor. And a lot of good that did him, Charles! Donald walked Washington Street there with utter free-and-easiness, with almost insolent impunity. Dull, lucky Donald! He, of course, did not have the devilish gift; Donald kissed no one. No one viewed Donald as her own true man; no home-maker chased him all over the city in a Fordette.

Behind him, Miss Grace pushed a flat button on the wall and said: "Tea'll be ready in a minute, Mr. Garrott. You really might as well stay, you know, as stand there looking out of the window."

The tutor made no reply. In fact, he did not hear Miss Grace. By strange luck, he was in the grip of an extraordinary, a truly fascinating experience. Quite suddenly, his ears had been captured by a sound from the street, a sound that had an arresting familiarity among all other sounds, a peculiar whirring, a rumbling, and a snorting, insistent, growing louder. Upon earth, was there but one noise like that?

Swifter than a bullet, Charles's eyes had gone speeding down the spacious street. And his heart leapt up within him as they lighted upon the self-propelling conveyance approaching — but half a block away, chugging steadily nearer. . . .

Yes, his word to the wise had not been wholly wasted, it seemed. There rumbled the good little Fordette after unconscious Donald, gaining on him, gaining almost rapidly. . . .

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"Mr. Garrott, what *are* you looking at?"

"Oh! . . . Nothing," said the tutor in a muffled voice.

But in truth, he was looking, with breathless interest, at the fairest sight seen by him in many a long day. Safe behind the Choristers' curtains, with general joy, with the acute delights of a born strategist, Charles saw what had so often happened to him, happen now to poor old Donald.

By odd coincidence, it fell out that the re-meeting of Mary Wing's two cousins took place within fifty feet of the Choristers' window. What more natural than that Angela, in the moment of passing her home-come friend, should look over her shoulder and speak a pleasant greeting? Or that Donald, surprised and civil, should unconsciously take a responsive step or two toward the sudden speaker of the greeting? What more certain than death or taxes but that the Fordette should thereupon come to a halt — which it did so easily and naturally? (Oh, how perfectly simple it all was, as you stood off and watched, how gentle and friendly and inexorable!) Casual talk seemed to spring up: how easily Charles, peeping with starting eyes between the parted curtains, could imagine it all! — "I'm so glad to see you back! I've wanted *so* to congratulate you on your great success! I'm crazy to hear about Wyoming!" And presently those crucial words, so innocent-looking, so sweet: "Mr. Manford, won't you let me," etc. "Truly I'm just out for a drive." And — sure enough — oh, by George! *Hooray!* There was the poor fool grinning; there he was compressing himself, clambering right into the jaws. *Ah, there, Miss Mary!* . . . And there the two young people went snorting away up the street: perfectly normally, though something in Donald's cramped position, his long legs hunched up to his chin, did oddly suggest a captive, seized and bound.

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The tutor astonished Miss Grace by bursting into a wild roar of laughter.

But of course, he understood, on cool analysis, that this really settled nothing. That exciting spectacle, which seemed to make the whole process so extremely concrete, represented a hope, nothing more. And the more this hope was scrutinized, the less substantial it seemed to become. Walking safely home in the golden afternoon, Charles suddenly recalled, with cold annoyance, a remark Donald had made, after his second walk with Angela in November: "Charlie, she worries me." And Angela, for her part, — though of course womanly, and hence agreeably plastic in her affections, — really seemed hardly more attracted to Donald, as yet. Charles thought he knew the reason, too. With a fresh chill, he recalled the look the girl had given him, on the corner near Berringer's, to-day.

Had he really "put her on" to Donald even in the remotest degree? Was it not highly probable that she, patrolling Washington Street at four-thirty, had been looking, not for Donald, but for another?

Of course, there could not be the slightest doubt that — for the present, at least — Angela preferred him to Donald, infinitely, unreasonably. And Angela usually got what she wanted, too, it seemed. For example, she had wanted to move her family from Mitchellton to this city, where he, Charles, lived. And she had moved.

XV

HE fell instinctively into a small manœuvre, which was merely this: that he quietly shifted forward his public itinerary by quarter of an hour. Next day, he started rapidly toward the street-cars at quarter before one, and shot out of Miss Grace's at quarter past four, sharp. Ultimate detection was certain, of course; but for the moment the trifling ruse did seem to win a hardly hoped-for respite in the headlong courtship. Neither on Friday, nor again on Monday, was the Home-Making Fordette so much as seen. And the next disturbance of the authority's delicate social scales, and of the author's Line, came, as might be said, from precisely the opposite direction.

In the Studio, matters had continued to progress backward. Once here, and the door safely shut, Charles had been steadily at work, the hymeneal shadow put resolutely from his mind. No writer's time, he had pledged himself, should go to somber meditations on the cosmic consequences of a kiss, still less to fruitless bitterness concerning wasted write-ups, the hardness of Egoettes, etc. Day by day, he had wooed that subtle calm of the spirit which is the bread and meat of authors; night by night, expended himself in the service of pure Letters. And it had all been for nothing.

Contrary to explicit resolve, in short, he had been making a fresh attempt at his new novel, hoping — rather weakly — that his mind was n't quite so unsettled as he secretly knew it was. And, once more, he had been well punished for his rashness. Symptoms of weakness having developed increasingly through the week just past, on Monday evening

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Charles took his medicine, just before supper. Ten thousand words of brand-new manuscript lay in his drawer there; and he would be lucky if he could save a thousand of them for the novel that should be.

Of the "line" taken by this second abortive effort, the less said the better. It suffices to suggest that if Mary Wing had been a totally different sort of person, it might never have been undertaken at all.

Of all ways of spending the time known among men, unquestionably the most abominable, the most nerve-wrecking and devilish, is Thinking up a Book. Charles smoked box after box of cigarettes, could n't sleep at night, talked in his sleep when he did, and was growing a scowl between his brows almost as dark as poor Two-Book McGee's — the interesting Type that was leading its own life and wished it were n't. The final conviction of the worthlessness of his work was hardly calculated to improve the young man's state of mind. He was, indeed, profoundly discouraged and concerned. For ten weeks now he had been struggling to isolate a point of view which would at once "carry" all his newer observations on his Subject, and command the support of his unqualified conviction. And to-night he seemed further away from his goal than he had been the day he finished "Bondwomen."

However, what brought Charles's humor to a sudden head this evening, what precipitated the fury in which Donald Manford found him — Donald, entering so happy and fine in the evening regalia which the match-making Mary seemed to clap on him every night nowadays — by chance had not to do with his own book at all, but with another's.

In short, the young author, very injudiciously in view of his resolve to think of Egoettes no more, had been dipping into "Marna."

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This book of Angela's had long lain as a plague on the mind of Charles. For a space, he had not returned the book because of the estrangement, or misunderstanding; for another space, because of the swiftly ripening intimacy, compelling the general policy of lying low; and now a large fresh obstacle had risen, in the girl's unfortunate remarks directly connecting the return of her book with a call. Whether, after that, he could harden his heart to slip "Marna" back to her by the hand of the Judge — without any appreciative blossoms, needless to say — remained to be seen. So long as the situation remained as it was, Charles had decided simply not to take up the worry at all.

Hence Angela's book rested, gathering dust on the Studio mantel. And, chancing to come on it in his moody paces after supper, the author had picked it up, in mere resentment at its being there. Standing hostilely, he permitted himself to skim a few pages of the stuff, toward the end. Next, with growing intention, he looked into the middle. And finally, he sat frankly down with "Marna" in the Judge's new easy-chair.

It had occurred to him that it was probably his professional duty to see what sort of line on the Unrest the other fellows were taking these days. This book here was enjoying an immense vogue; every newspaper reminded you that it was the Best Selling Book in America. What truth, then, did it have to tell? Or — put more simply — it may be that Charles had merely fallen a weak victim to the true writer's continual temptation and longing, viz.: to clutch at anything, anything, that will keep him from having to write, or think up.

Angela's book (which was so strangely unlike Angela) had come from the typewriter of a brilliant and industrious British Thinker. From the "literary criticism" and publisher's advertising that he read — and he seemed to read little else in

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these days — Charles had already gathered that “Marna” followed that simple “ultra-modern” line which to him, with his expanding knowledge, now seemed so oddly old-fashioned. In his standing skim just now, he had noted, with quickening distaste, how easily *Marna* accomplished a glorious Career: as, indeed, a girl has small excuse for not doing, when she has an able author working for her night and day. In particular, he observed that her “demonstrating experiment in freer forms of union” turned out far more happily than poor unauthored Flora Trevenna’s. As well as Charles could make out, *Marna*’s swain not only had a wife living when she met him, but was engaged to another woman besides. But when the splendid girl said to him, on page 478: “What a joy, beloved, to strike back at the grubby little people who’re trying to fetter the love-spirit! Ah, but I’m glad you’re married!” — after this, every one knew that it was all up with *De Bevoies*, who, being a poet, could hardly be expected to argue back at agreeable talk of this sort. (*Marna* had met him at an anarchist “social”; he was stunningly modern, and borrowed two pounds from her the first thing next morning.) Not long after the talkative but Higher Honeymoon on the Breton Coast, *Mrs. De Bevoies* died, with thoughtful promptness, and it was noted that the New couple at once adopted the old-established form of union, after all, and (of course) quickly became the toasts of London.

“George ! . . . How easy writing would be,” thought Charles, with great indignation — “if only the truth were as simple as that!”

And then, seated under the lamp Wallie Flower had so skillfully repaired, he turned to page 1, intent upon getting this other fellow’s heroine, and her Career, at the point of origin. The *Twexhams*, he learned, lived quietly, thirty miles from

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London. (Their address, if it is of the smallest interest, was Fernleigh Cottage, the Priory, Dean's Highgate, Lower-Minter-on-the-Mavern, Essex.) *Marna Twexham* had the striking beauty conventional among the Freewomen of fiction. Having had a year at college, attended several gatherings in the Redmantle Club vein, and read three or more books in which unmarried women told the truth about Life, she inevitably reached the conclusion that it was her duty to make herself free. Put in another way, she saw that it was her duty to go to London. For, of course, "young women of genius" understand perfectly that freedom is a matter of geography, a metropolitan consummation, as we might term it, and would properly smile at the antediluvian who maintained that people can be free in the suburbs, if they can be anywhere. Thus *Marna* smiled at the old fogey, her father, who opposed her going to London to be free. It seemed that the old chap, for reasons Charles could not fathom, actually wanted to keep the girl with him. "There are dangers in London that a good woman knows nothing of," he said, warningly; but *Marna* eyed him so knowingly that he changed his tune at once. "You are all we have left, Marny dear," he wheedled. "Don't go away from us — yet, at any rate." "Why is it assumed that a woman who does not choose to marry is *left*?" asked the wise strong girl; and while her father scratched his head over this poser, she continued, firm but kind: "Really, you know, Dad, the idea that people have got to spend their lives together merely because of an accidental birth relation — really, you know, all that's jolly well played out. We've proved quite too awfully much about the beastly repressive influence of the family-tie." "But your sister! — poor invalid Muriel!" pleaded old *Twexham*. "She loves you so much, she so dependent on you! It will kill her to —" *Marna's* smile, check-

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ing his maundering, was a great credit to her self-control (the author said). To set up playing checkers with a neurasthenic spinster, against a soul's sacred duty to itself and mankind! "Can't you really see, Dad," she said, quite patiently, "that a trained nurse can look after my sister much more efficiently than I can?" "It is n't that — exactly," faltered the moss-back parent. "It's your love she needs. And — I feel that you *do* belong to us, Marny dear! I feel that —" "No, father," replied the glorious creature, gazing out the oriel window, over the terrace, rose-garden, etc., and into the morning sun. "I belong — out there! Such small abilities as I may possess," said *Marna* with exquisite modesty, "belong to the Race. Such small contributions as I may be able to make to the thought of my time, I dare not withhold. I cannot be weakly sentimental — and stay," she concluded, with some feeling. (And indeed Dean's Highgate *was* a quiet, dull place; Lower-Minter-on-the-Mavern, also.) Presently, the old fellow broke down and wept, and then *Marna*, repelled, eyeing him as if he were something odd and decidedly contemptible, said firmly . . .

"Nasty little beast!" cried Charles Garrott, aloud.

He leapt from Judge Blenso's easy-chair, and glared about like one desirous of something to kick, and that right quickly. Then, with a flashing understanding of his need, he went springing toward the Studio window. And passionately he flung the window wide, and passionately he hurled the best-selling book in America forth into the winter night.

"Faugh!" shouted Charles.

Down in dark Mason Street, the shooting "*Marna*" struck the limb of a large tree, and caroming violently, bounded back against a passing old gentleman in a black felt hat, who looked like a Confederate veteran. The old 'un, starting with annoyance, clapped a hand to his shoulder, and gazed round and up;

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then, suddenly catching sight of the young man standing at the third-story window, he shouted something in a high angry voice, and brandished an aged arm with menace. But the young man merely continued to stand there, silently scowling down at him. So then the old gentleman, composing himself but resolved that he should not be smitten for nothing, picked up Miss Angela Flower's new book from the sidewalk before him, dusted it carefully with an experienced handkerchief, and hobbled away with it into the darkness.

"Disgusting little Egoette!" said Charles, scowling after him. . . . "And that's the sort of stuff that passes for *thinking* nowadays! That's the stuff our women are reading, forming their —"

"Who 're you cussing out the window, Charlie?" said Donald Manford's hearty voice behind him.

Charles wheeled sharply.

He resented being walked in on this way; resented all companionship from his kind just now; in especial, he resented Donald Manford's contented, care-free face. At the same time, this face of Donald's awakened other and different emotions, relative to the slim hope it embodied, and enjoining tact, some cunning.

So, controlling himself, Charles merely said: "Well? What 're you horning in here for?"

"Dying for one glimpse of your sweet phiz. Nice welcome!" laughed the young engineer, exuberantly. "But how'd you ever get into a street-row, Charlie, out of your third-story window?"

"Oh! . . . Just talking to myself. Bad habit of mine," he said, with an effort. "You're rather flossy to-night! — out to give the girls a treat, I gather. Let's see. German, I suppose?"

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Laying his tall hat tenderly on the Judge's little typewriter-table, Donald acknowledged the soft impeachment.

"Well, who's the lucky lady, this time? — Or maybe you're staggings?"

"Who, me? Not on your life! I've got Miss Carson again—lucky thing!"

"Indeed," said the author, coldly.

"And a pippin she is too! Talk about clever, Charlie! By Jove, there's a girl that makes a fellow use his cocoa all the time, let me tell you!"

Charles sat down heavily at his writing-table, and lit a cigarette. Mary Wing managed her affairs well, indeed. He spoke with mysterious bitterness: —

"You *are* blossoming out! If anybody'd told me last year that you'd be praising one of the new highbrow sisters, I'd have kicked him downstairs for a liar."

"When a girl can look like that, my boy —"

"Developing into a regular man-flirt too, are n't you? Last I heard of you, you were driving up Washington Street with Miss Flower."

Instead of resenting the odious epithet, Donald's face was seen to assume a pleased smirk.

"Ho! — had your spies on me, have you? Why, did we pass you to-day?"

Charles's heart seemed to leap a little. "Why, no," he said, sweetly. "I was speaking of one day last week. So you stole another drive to-day — you sly rascal!"

"Don't know that you'd call it driving, exactly. Where'd that brother of hers dig the little four-wheeler, d'you s'pose? I thought that kind were extinct, same as the Dodo —"

"Why, I think it's a very nice little car, Donald! Small, old-fashioned, yes — but very comfortable and — easy-going.

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I've — ah — had a — a number of pleasant drives in it. The real trouble is," said Charles, with immense carelessness, "she honestly does n't know how to manage it very well as yet. And I, of course, don't know how to teach her — unfortunately."

Having seated himself in Judge Blenso's chair, Donald was lighting, with a lordly air, one of Judge Blenso's cigars; the Judge himself being at his club, through lack of interest in the Studio. Extinguishing his match by waving it languidly back and forth, the youth said, with a faint reminiscent smile:—

"Well, I gave her a pretty good lesson this afternoon, far as that goes. Had a very fairish time, too. Nice little girl, she is."

The author gazed, with a sort of nervous incredulity. He laughed hurriedly.

"Nice! — well, I should say so! She's — she's charming! You'll have to look pretty sharp if you want any more drives there — too much competition! But, of course, she may not be *bookish* enough, to suit your new taste —"

"Oh, bookish, no. She's not that sort. I'll tell you what your little friend is, Charlie," said the young engineer, with an air of insufferable conceit. "She's what *I* call a womanly woman."

Charles averted his eyes. This simple fool's quick response to the "putting on" treatment almost passed belief. Unquestionably, Donald was far more receptive to feminine influences now, than he had been in his industrious pre-Wyoming days; again, mere use, mere custom and propinquity, were famous for accomplishing just these wonders. Still, Charles's philosophic over-mind, contrasting this grin on Donald's face with that unflattering remark of his last November, threw out a different concept, viz.: that perseverance in a woman is a marvelous thing.



"HO! — HAD YOUR SPIES ON ME, HAVE YOU?"

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But the hope, though it shot up delightfully, was a thin one yet. Dull Donald went on knowingly: —

“But speaking of the competition, what ’s happened to you, old horse?”

“How do you mean, happened to me?”

“Your little friend says you used to meet her nearly every day for a drive, but now you have n’t been seen for days. I told her you ’d probably changed your hours a little, as I ’d seen you at lunch earlier than —”

“You did?” said the author, looking at the engineer with unconcealed annoyance. “Well, you were mistaken, that ’s all! You had no business to say anything of the sort. Of course, my hours may vary a little — in fact, they vary a good deal. Great heavens, I —”

“Well, don’t get peevish about it! — friendly tip I ’m giving you, that ’s all. She thinks you ’re mad with her — do you get me? Says you ’ve never forgiven her for something she said to you once — some misunderstanding you had — you know, I guess —”

“Why, damnation, we never *had* any misunderstanding! I ’m *busy*! I don’t undertake to start to lunch at a certain particular second —”

“Well, don’t tell it to me!” said Donald, cheerfully. “Trot along and explain it to her, that ’s the way. — I say, Charlie — change the subject — did I tell you what old Gebhardt said to me the first day we looked over the plans? About my concrete bridge over Sankey River?”

And then the childish egotistical youth was off. It seemed, indeed, that the monologue ensuing was what he had come for; it seemed that he had dressed himself one hour too early for the German with just this most agreeable of all purposes in his mind: to sit and have a good long talk about himself. Charles

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received his boastings with restless boredom, marking meaninglessly on the pad before him, moodily biding his time. He could have kicked Donald for his stupidity in mentioning his trifling change of hours; but of course his need was to get the conversation back to Angela quietly, without arousing the slightest suspicion. His need was that Donald should agree to give Angela regular lessons in driving the Fordette, every day through the lunch-hour.

But Donald, happening to note the face of Big Bill, came suddenly to his feet: and then, as suddenly, gave the talk an unlooked-for turn.

"I say, Charlie! How about you and old Blenso for the Wings' apartment?"

Charles's head came slowly round. "How about what?"

"Dashed sight more comfortable than up your two flights here!"

"The Wings' apartment is for rent?"

"Did n't you know that, old stick-in-the-mud? What's the matter with you? Mary's been hunting a tenant for two weeks."

Charles, finding it unnecessary to state that he had not seen Mary for exactly that length of time, — barring one very transient meeting on the street, — merely indicated, without any polish, that, not being a gadabout ass like some, he made no pretense of keeping up with all the latest tittle-tattle.

He then asked, in a voice indicating no interest in the subject: "What's Mrs. Wing going to do?"

"Going to North Carolina to live with Fanny."

"With Fanny! . . . I suppose she did n't consider going with Miss Mary?"

"Could n't stand the pressure. Why, New York would kill her off like a fly! And besides, she does n't want to get too

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far away from the Warders, you know. Of course, Fanny can't make her very comfortable just now — but we talked it all over and that seemed the best arrangement, all round."

"I see."

"Mary can't turn back now, of course. Well, Charlie," said Donald, earnestly, "I don't hold with her fool notions, and all that, but hang it all! — she's no ordinary woman, and this is no ordinary job. Those people are giving her two assistants and \$5000 a year. What d' you know about that for a poor little girl?"

He was struggling to get into his overcoat without "breaking" his shirt-front — going at once, evidently. But Charles had lost sight of his strategic intentions.

"Well, how about you two old chaps for the furnished apartment — February fifteenth, if you want it?"

Charles observed that he could n't look at it. Donald, as if only stimulated by his host's taciturnity, became sentimental.

"First Mary, then Mrs. Wing, then me — this is going to be a break-up, Charlie, do you realize it? I'm beginning to feel it, too, let me tell you! Jove," said Donald, putting on his shining head-piece and bringing the conversation back to himself simultaneously — "now that I come right down to it, I don't want to leave this good old town!"

He departed, to his unconscious match-making. Charles, left alone, merely sat on at his table. And all that he thought of Angela Flower now was of an insignificant remark she had let fall, the first time they had walked together: "Mr. Garrott, do you know who *Marna* reminded me of? Somebody you admire a great deal. . . ."

And then for half an hour, his writer's mind insisted on working over and over that detestable conversation between *Marna* and her father, and changing it a little, just a little

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touch here and there, to make it fit smoothly upon Mrs. Wing and Mary. . . .

"I tell you," said the lonely authority, suddenly, bringing his fist down on the table with a thump,—"this whole Movement's a failure if it lessens *woman's loveliness!* I tell you the whole object of this Movement is to make women *more lovable!*"

For he, of course, had never thought — like the author of "Marna" for example — that passionate love was the only sort of love worth mentioning. In that narrow sense, in her sufficiently cheap faculty for stirring the senses of men, it was clear that woman, whatever she did or left undone, would always remain "lovable." But as to love in broad and human terms — well (to keep the subject wholly impersonal); could any one in his senses call *Marna* a lovable being? No, her creator, in his determination to show how strong and "free" she was, had quite unconsciously made her a harsh and vain self-worshiper, revolting to decent persons. Had he, as we might say, thus inadvertently given the whole thing away? Was it finally true that a woman could not claim and lead her Own Life, except at a heavy price — paid down in her best treasure? Was the ruthless Career-Maker but the logical other-form of the waiting, the too pursuing, Maker of Homes?

From his drawer, Charles presently pulled out the former exercise-book which had enjoyed the great rise in the world. In this book, he had written no sentence since his remembered Notes on Flora Trevenna. Now he set down with a firm hand: —

What is called the Woman's Movement is seen, in the last analysis, to be only every woman's struggle between two irreconcilable impulses in her own nature.

Having written that sentence, the young man stared at it

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long. To him it was like a bright beam of light, turned upon the roots of his peculiar problem. For if these two impulses were in truth irreconcilable, why need he go on struggling to reconcile them in a heroine he could unreservedly admire?

XVI

WITH the sun of a new noon, with the recurring need of obtaining sustenance from one's environment, there came again the more practical problems of this weary world.

At ten minutes past one on this day, Tuesday, Charles went slipping from the house of the little Deming boys to that of the old lady who was studying French. She lived, luckily, but three doors away. She was a very lively old lady, and possessed her tutor's high regard. But that she might represent help to him, that she could personify the tutelary god of Bachelors rushing at last to his aid, had simply never crossed his mind.

The old lady's regular lesson-hour was, of course, two-thirty o'clock. But, as it happened, she had had her last instruction in the French language for some time to come, it having popped into her head, and that of the old gentleman her husband, to go to Palm Beach for a three weeks' vacation. Hence her tutor's presence in her drawing-room at this unwonted hour seemed to be due to mere chance (though who knows?). In short, as he saw it, he had merely "stopped by" to deliver a list of irregular verbs, which the old lady was to master completely while at the Beach.

Having stopped, Charles did not start again upon the instant: far from it. Friday's and Monday's run of luck had not been expected to keep up indefinitely, at the best. And Donald's blundering remark betraying his ruse had inevitably suggested the idea of experimenting a bit with opposite tactics, to

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wit: quietly turning his schedule backward, for variety's sake, and starting to lunch very late. Thus it was that Charles, having said all he had to say to the old lady, lingered to say it all again, and again, clinging verbosely to his oldest living pupil as it were, while one eye shot perpetually out the front window, close beside which he had taken up his position.

For the third time, the old lady promised to be studious on her holiday.

"Don't you remember how well I knew the plurals of the *-ou* nouns yesterday?" said she, chipper as a boy. "Well, my husband had heard them every one to me the night before! — that was how I did it! Well, don't you see, I'll make him hear me the verbs every afternoon while he's taking his nap — over and over!"

"Exactly, ma'am. Do just that. Have him hear them over and over — every afternoon. That's the only way really to master them — the only possible way. And as I say — be sure to take along your dictionary and your Fontaine's 'Fables,' and read three or four pages every day — except Sunday. I said that just now, I know. But, ma'am, it's one of those things that — ah — can't be said too often —"

Here the tutor's eye, reconnoitering out the window again, fell upon a motor-car just coming to a standstill before the old lady's door. He started, nervously. But, of course, this was not the Fordette: it was five times too big, at least.

And he said, in a quickened voice: "Whose car is that standing out there?"

"Why, mine, of course! Eustace stops for orders before going down to bring my husband up and I just sign to him out of the window if there's nothing. Indeed I hoped you would n't make me read my 'Fables' while I was away, but I will if you say so, for of course I'm going to learn French. And you take

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care of yourself, young man. You haven't looked well to me for several days."

"I'm not quite well, ma'am, I fear," said Charles. "I was just thinking I'd better let Eustace drive me down with him, if you don't mind. I — ah — scarcely feel like walking to-day."

"Of course. And have him bring you up again when he takes my husband back, why don't you? My dear young man, I reproach myself. I'd have had him call for you at the Demings' and take you down every day, but you know you always said you loved to walk."

"I did — I used to — but — ah — I rather think I've been overdoing it, of late. I've been walking more than is good for me. Well! — thank you very much. I'll go and get right in, shall I?"

Having wished his aged pupil a happy journey once more, Charles started toward the door, much pleased with his lucky stroke. And then, all at once, a splendid idea burst upon him, a vast and brilliant possibility. And in exactly the same instant, he heard the chipper voice of the old lady speaking again behind him, rather thoughtfully: —

"I wish I could persuade you to use my car altogether while we're away. . . . But I suppose you'd think that fearfully — fearfully *effete!*"

"WHAT?"

It must have seemed odd to her, the instantaneousness with which her tutor sprang round. And then he began to move back toward her, very slowly, round unwinking eyes glued upon her.

"Ah — *what did you say?*"

"You look astounded. I suppose you're offended at the suggestion. Now, really — why not take my car while I'm away?" said the old lady. (What a dear, what a darling old

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lady she was, to be sure!) "Why are you young men so reckless with your health, breaking it down with all this foolish walking, up and down —"

"Oh, ma'am!" stammered Charles. "I—I hardly know what to say. I'm not offended in the *least* — feeling as I do at present. But I—I really —"

"Then I'll make you do it!" she said, with the greatest energy. "I'm going to exert all my will-power — I'm chock full of it, I warn you! — and make you use the car regularly from now on, and stop this walking. Promise me! I'll have Eustace report to you every morning for his orders, and you are to use him as your own . . ."

The tutor stood like a man entranced. Before his mind's eye there were unrolling the most enchanting pictures: pictures of the same series that had fascinated Angela's mind's eye when her brother had offered her the Fordette, but of precisely the opposite intention; pictures of himself whizzing securely from point to point, here or there at his careless ease, all walking henceforth reduced to the mere hurried crossing of sidewalks. . . .

"But I—I'm afraid it would be an imposition! I don't deny it would be a — a pleasure — a benefit — feeling as I —"

"Then that's settled! Imposition, nonsense! As it happens, you will be doing us a favor. Why, was n't my husband saying only last night that Eustace, having nobody at all to look after him, was certain to spend these three weeks in one long spree, and be worn to a shadow when we get back? His habits are so unfortunate, I warn you about that —"

"It's so — *awfully* — kind of you, ma'am! I hardly know how to —"

"Not another word! — leave all the rest to me. And you really don't look well, young man. Now, shall I have Bruce

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make you something, — oh, very nice, — before you start down? Oh, why, bless you, I take a julep myself whenever I feel the least bit like it!"

Then the ardor of his gratitude really touched the old lady, even though it seemed excessive for her small courtesy. Later, looking out the window, to sign to Eustace, she saw that the young man was actually laughing to himself with pleasure, as he went down the front steps. She thought him a very strange young man.

He gave his machine-god standing orders, which, after all, proved simple enough. Eustace and the Big Six were to pick him up at the little Deming boys' every day at one o'clock, and drive him to lunch; Eustace and the Big Six were to call for him at Mrs. Herman's every afternoon at half-past three, and take him to and from the Choristers'. Those, positively, were the only danger-points, these the small arrangements by which peril was to be circumvented. And he had not overrated the value of his brilliant gift from fortune; the arrangements, being made, were executed with the happiest success. In the fine big limousine of the old lady (*la grande jolie limousine de la vieille*) Charles pursued his daily rounds in complete security, and he hardly saw the shadow of another meeting now.

Or rather, there was the possibility of but one more meeting; and, that scarcely seemed to matter, now that he had so clearly won back his voluntary celibacy.

At Saltman's bookstore, he had purchased a fresh copy of the odious "Marna," and in his new kindness and good-will toward all, he finally resolved to return the book in person, and to ask for Angela at the door, to boot. Utter freedom of the city upheld his native dislike for being a mere rude boor. And by one simple venture, he could honorably liquidate all

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claims, pay at one stroke all the various calls demanded of him: the book-call, the party-call, and the call in acknowledgment of the Kiss.

Even if Angela should happen to be at home when he called, the isolated meeting could hardly lead to trouble. But, after all, of course, the point was to fulfill rather the letter of a call than its essential spirit. Charles thought it decidedly for the best that Angela should not be at home at the time. Thus he further procrastinated, awaiting an afternoon so sweet and balmy that every owner of a self-propelling vehicle would be morally certain to be out in it.

And then, while he so dallied about the Call, while his own days continued to reel off smooth as clockwork, a faint new cloud began to steal over his first careless happiness. Having finally saved himself, the unheroic bachelor felt his deadened consideration for others slowly and reluctantly stirring into life.

The first time he in his speedy limousine passed captive Donald in the Fordette, Charles was even more pleased than he had been that other day, at Miss Grace's window. By chance, he overhauled the little conveyance on the second day of the new era, as he shot away from the Choristers' at half-past four o'clock; and, captivated by the sight of the simpleton engineer in his own old place, he could not resist leaning forward as he drew abreast, knocking on the window and waving gayly to the two nice normal cousins of Mary. He saw that Angela, recognizing him, gave him one swift surprised stare. And then the old lady's Big Six leapt by her, as the limited leaps by a tank in the night, and he sat back convulsed with a brilliant diplomat's delights.

He, indeed, had put her on. Clearer and clearer it grew that he could beat Mary Wing at match-making, if at nothing else under the sun. . . . Let her look to herself!

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But the second time Charles had this interesting experience — just two days later, on his drive to Berringer's — he did not knock on the window, or laugh, or even smile. No, this time he sat still on his luxurious seat, looking straight ahead. And presently he found himself arguing, very earnestly and conscientiously, and somewhat as follows: —

While it might be true that for the moment Angela liked him best (entirely owing to the tender feelings aroused by the Kiss) no one could deny that a match between her and Donald would be a far more suitable thing. In fact, such a match would really be very suitable, indeed, whatever cold-blooded eugenists like Mary Wing might think. Talk as you liked, Donald was not at all the man to be happy with a girl who firmly and continually "made a fellow use his cocoa." On the contrary, Donald was the mere simple, primitive male who wanted a woman that he could "protect," feel superior to and be coddled and attended by. And any fair-minded person must admit that Angela, whatever little faults or foibles she might seem to have, was precisely this sort of girl. Harsh nonsense about her Sacred Duty to the Race was not in her.

Did she, indeed, have any faults — real faults of character, that is? Womanly though she was, she was no idler, no parasite like Miss Grace, for instance, but a genuine worker, accustomed to pay her own way by the practice of a highly specialized and difficult business. This business, at best, was a monotonous and grinding one; she herself was a stranger, poor and lonely. Was it so wicked, then, that in her leisure-hour she should wish to drive out occasionally, and meet her young friends?

The Big Six, "Marna," the matter of the Wings' flat, doubtless each had contributed in its way to put Angela back in her true light: the light she had shone in before the days of the

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wooing. Admit, if you liked, that for the moment her purely feminine, or pursuing, side might seem to be just a little over-developed: that, argued Charles, was but a temporary, and really a proper and necessary manifestation. The Home that Angela was at present engaged in making was Dr. and Mrs. Flower's Home. The Will in things had it that every girl should have a Home of her own to make. There lay the momentary source of Unrest: considered rightly, the Fordette was merely the ingenious instrument employed by the Will for working out its high designs. Once that was accomplished, once Angela was established in her own little nest as Donald's sweet true wife, then, beyond doubt, her essentially womanly side would at once spring into full possession of her. Then she would fairly settle to her life-work of making her own Home, while supplying large quantities of just the sort of beauty and charm that engineers appreciate most.

Moreover (concluded Charles's argument of the case) marriage was clearly a matter where quixotism was misplaced, and a man's first duty was to himself. And, finally, of course he would never have put her on to Donald, if he had known that the old lady was going to lend him her limousine. But he had not known: and that was the old lady's fault if anybody's.

On the night of this day, by chance, — the day of Donald's known fourth drive in the instrument of the Will, — as Charles lay prone upon the Studio lounge, feebly thinking up, Judge Blenso suddenly opened the Studio door and said: "Charles! A lady at the 'phone!" Instantly coming to an elbow, Charles inquired who this lady might be; and the Judge (whose manner toward his relative had markedly changed, since Charles was known to have abandoned his exercises and foregone his affair of honor) replied with great coldness: "It's Miss Rose. Come along!" "Miss Rose?" repeated

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Charles, slowly beginning to rise. "Why, I don't —" "Yes, yes, I said! Miss Rose! No! — let me see! Miss Flower — something of the sort! Good gad, how long're you going to keep her waiting?" But Charles, remembering the promised bridge-party in a flash, said: "I'm sick, Judge," and lay back on the lounge forthwith. "Ah — just say, please, that you found me lying down — not well at all. She might leave a message, if necessary." To which the Judge replied, disgusted: "I don't wonder you're sick, the sickenin' life you lead! By gad, sir! — can't even *walk*! . . ."

No message came back other than that Miss Flower was sorry to hear he was n't well. But the little incident, though nothing came of it, showed clearly that she was n't going to give him up without a struggle, Donald or no. He could never feel completely safe until she was married, and that was the truth. And he still had that cursed book to return, too.

But it seemed that his higher nature, once aroused, would not go quietly back to sleep again. The first glad selfish days were over. When, on the Tuesday following, he again saw Donald as Angela's willing captive, when, shooting by, he observed the fatuous youth ogling and smirking over his predicament, as much as to say that there was no such person as Helen Carson, then Charles's face became very grave, his look intensely thoughtful. And when he reached Berringer's that day, he ordered — sure enough — "Wait for me, Eustace." And when he emerged from Berringer's, at a little before two, he said, in the face of all resolves: —

"To Olive and Washington Streets, Eustace. And then turn and go slowly out Dean Street, toward Lee Grammar School."

XVII

PARTLY because she was not ready to resign her place in the schools, partly, perhaps, to heighten the dramatic stinging quality of what she called her "brilliant revenge," Mary Wing had kept her great *coup* a secret for the present. So she, famous wherever weekly periodicals were read round the world, honored officer-elect of a powerful national organization, walked daily, in sun and rain, to a grammar school as before.

As to looks and appearance, Charles had always recognized Mary as one of the variable women. She was not indifferent on those subjects, he judged, but the utilitarian supremacy of work in her life commonly produced that effect. Mary rarely went to parties any more; but at her flat in Olive Street she often enough entertained at dinner, strategically, a person or two of consequence in the educational or political world. Charles (being, of course, of not the slightest help to anybody) had never been invited to but one of these little dinners. On that solitary occasion, the look and air of his friend in evening dress had considerably surprised him, and in several other ways, including the dinner, he had absorbed agreeable impressions of Mary not tallying with other impressions. However, pretty clothes and pretty manner were deemed too good for every day, it seemed; for the realities, Mary dressed as plainly as she acted. And now, trudging homeward along this slightly squalid street, she looked, it must be admitted, not like a shining celebrity at all, but just like an ordinary person, a school-teacher, and rather a fatigued one at that.

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So, at least, thought the author of the write-ups, catching sight of her through the glass over Eustace's shoulder, noting the somewhat droopy manner of her walk. But he reflected, there was no satisfying some people. And hastily clutching up the speaking-tube of the old lady, he gave the order which brought his great car to a standstill; and so stepped forth upon the sunny sidewalk, just in front of her.

The General Secretary looked up, with a small start at finding herself intercepted. She saw Charles Garrott, and her face changed perceptibly, though under what impulse he could scarcely have said. That his recent demeanor must have seemed slightly puzzling to her, the young man was, however, sufficiently aware: and now he was all at once conscious of a want of ease within himself, a rare and odd constraint.

Hence he fell instinctively into his lightest and most mask-like tone: "Well met! I was hoping I might run on you somewhere out this way. Do get in and let me take you home."

Mary accepted at once, with pleasure.

"But whose beautiful car is this you're using now?" she went on easily. "I was sure I saw you whiz by in it the other day."

"Oh, this! — yes! — I must tell you about it."

So due explanations covered the start of the drive. Establishing his famous friend in the old lady's limousine, Charles told, in modified, expurgated form, how he had got possession of it. For Angela's benefit, he had lately informed Donald that he was unwell from overwork: that was why he had to ride in a closed car wherever he went. Report of this had unluckily reached Mary, it seemed, necessitating more explanation: that he was not sick at all, unless you would count writer's sickness, etc., etc.

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"And this saves such a lot of time, getting around, too — which is no small thing."

The conclusion of the explanation was followed by a small silence: scarcely one of the golden sort, but rather a dearth of conversation such as had once been rare between these two. But Mary, whose manner seemed as usual, or perhaps only the least bit more polite, broke it at once, saying cordially: —

"So you have an extra hour for your own work now? That's splendid! And how's your new novel getting on?"

"Oh! — not at all, thank you! I've made two starts, but both of them proved false, I regret to state. So now I'm back at zero again. It's a hard business, writing a book. . . . And as far as I can make out, I'm specially handicapped by having all sorts of foolish theories as to what a novel ought to be. If I were only a good plain realist now, how simple life would be!"

His tongue loosened; he found himself embracing the chance topic, so hard and impersonal, so beautifully remote from everything that fretted his mind. He had come, magnanimously, to give one fair warning about Donald; but no doubt he planned it that his warning should fall casually, half-buried in other talk. There was such a thing as being too generous for self-interest, of course. Or possibly Charles perceived that the sound of his own voice, running surely along on a subject of which he knew everything, and she knew nothing, gave him just that sense of easy command of the situation which his manly need demanded.

Mary had said courteously: "You think realism is so much easier to write?"

"I've never tried, of course — but does n't it impress you so? You remember old Meredith said distinctly, that was the cue for little writers. And I must say I think he had an idea what he was talking about. In fact," continued Charles,

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with unwonted loquacity, while his limousine rolled rapidly, "if I were old and generally recognized as the dean of American novelists — kindly do not laugh — and was visited for counsel by a young writing fellow who had no literary abilities except industry — why, I should say to him at once, 'My dear young man, become a realist, of course. That is really the only line where you will find your want of abilities a positive advantage. If you possess any shred of humor, charm, insight, sympathy, idealism, so-called, — above all, idealism, — and if you are cursed with any sense of form and unity, and feel that a story ought to have a beginning and an end, and be *about* something in the mean time, — why, trample on all this as you would on so many snakes,' I should say to him. 'Get it fixed firmly in your dull mind that life is dreary and meaningless, or has but a material meaning, if you like, and that sound fiction must behave accordingly. Then,' I should say to my young friend, 'if you will but choose as your heroine a young girl with more looks than character — and not necessarily such a lot of looks either — who comes up to the city to get on, it is inconceivable to me that even you could fail to score a great realistic success.' — 'But,' we can imagine this fellow, this nonexistent admirer of mine, saying, 'I don't understand you. What am I, as a creative author, to put in to take the place of the insight, humor, unity, and all the rest that I've eliminated?' 'My poor boy, I've just told you,' I should reply. 'Industry and pessimism. That is all a realist knows and all he needs to know. You tell me you have the industry. I tell you that the pessimism is the easiest little trick to pick up in the world.' But," said Charles, in his own voice, "I fear, Miss Mary, I'm putting you to sleep with all this musty shop-talk —"

"Indeed, no! — it's extremely interesting," said the heroine

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of the write-ups, very civilly, but looking straight ahead. "You don't often talk about your work."

"Have n't often had the chance," thought Charles. And if that was considerably unjust, he did not seem to mind at all, but rather was pleased by the knowledge that Mary observed his copious ironic manner, and found it baffling and queer.

"Well, — in conclusion, as you public speakers say, — I was only going to add that I did n't know enough to swallow my own medicine. The trouble seems to be — Well, take the horrible thing called sentiment now, that makes a sophisticated realist so sick. I look about me and, try as I will, I seem to see the disgusting thing very much alive and kicking — not something made up by a fourth-class writer to tickle shopgirls, but actually playing a prominent part in the hard world round me, all the time, everywhere. I seem — "

"I don't see how any one could deny that!"

"It would n't seem so, would it?" said Charles respectfully, and a sudden faint gleam came into his eye. "But really is n't that what they do, in effect? Here am I, as an observer, seeing men and women all round me doing things they don't want to do, giving up things they do want to do" — did his voice, too, acquire a thin edge? — "for immaterial reasons that can only be traced to some inner ideal — hated word! And then here am I, as a writer, required to deny all these observations of mine — and for what reason? Merely, as far as I can make out, to keep some sour chap with a defective liver, probably a German to boot — why are Germans so pessimistic, do you know? — from calling me a sentimental ass. Of course we admit," he prattled on, taking note of the passing streets, "that sentiment is weak and childish and Victorian, and 'idealism' is the screaming joke on Western civilization. Still, is n't it my only business as a writer to find out whether or

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not these contemptible things do act and react in the life I see? And if they do — must I represent the contrary, merely to please the peculiar taste of a small sad school that has no God but a second-hand mannerism bagged from dear old Europe? — By the way, are you in a special hurry now?"

"Why, no. Not at all."

"Good! — Eustace," called Charles through the tube, "drive more slowly."

And then, feeling himself completely master of the situation now, the young man said with quite a gay laugh: —

"And to add to all my other troubles, I've deliberately gone and taken Woman for my subject! That will make you smile! You remember you warned me in advance it was a theme I did n't know the first thing about."

But Mary was not observed to smile.

"I did say that, in fun once," she said, punctiliously, after a perceptible pause — "but, of course, I did n't mean it — in any literal sense. . . Indeed, I think —"

"But you were right — absolutely! — that's just what I want to say! I'm finding out more and more every day how true that word was. This whole Movement now — what is it? What's it for? Blest if I know! The last time we talked about it, you may remember, I took the ground that the Movement — or what I supposed was the Movement, that week — suffered by confusing itself with another propaganda it had n't a thing under the sun to do with. But —"

"No — what propaganda? I don't remember."

"Oh! — Personal Liberty! . . . The Cult of the Ego, perhaps you might call it. But, of course, for all I know," said the light masterful Charles, "that *is* the Movement, and always has been. Only last week I lighted on a new formula — sort of a definition — to-morrow I'll probably discard it for

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another. It's very unsettling — for my writing, you know. By the way — can't you help me out a little? What would be your best definition of the Unrest — for literary purposes?"

But Mary, with a carefulness not usual to her, eluded controversy, merely saying it all depended on how you looked at it, or words to that effect. And then she gave him a small thrill by neatly taking his bait.

"But what is your new definition?"

"Oh, that! Definition's too grand a word, of course. I merely wondered if what is called the Woman's Movement was anything more than a projection — don't you know? — of an everlasting struggle going on between two irreconcilable elements in every woman's nature."

The car rolled in silence.

"There's a pessimistic definition for you! For I suppose," said the friend of women, and could no longer keep the seriousness out of his voice, "it must be true that every struggle implies the defeat — of something. . . . Does n't it? I suppose we can really never get away from the sad discovery of childhood, that we can't eat our cake and have it too."

"That's interesting! But I don't believe I understand you altogether. What do you symbolize as the cake?"

She, the strong and successful, had turned on him her level arched gaze, intent with its habitual interrogativeness. It was instantly clear that, though she might be struck with his few remarks, she was far indeed from being struck personally. And her sudden characteristic look was to him like a hand held up, the banner of her independence flung out — and just in time, too.

Charles laughed mirthlessly. He was aware of the lameness of his reply.

"Exactly! — what? It all depends on how you look at it, as

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you just said. And I seem unable to look at it the same way two days running. . . . Number 6 Olive Street, Eustace."

Mary's response escaped him.

He sat staring through the glass, at the passing sights, a curious sense of anti-climax within, a strange flat feeling of failure. He was like a boy who, having run valiantly at a jump, tamely subsides and ducks under the string. What then? Had he really been about to court a new humiliation by *lecturing* Mary Wing? Telling himself that he came generously to warn her about Donald, had he actually been thinking that he would discuss the personal losses involved in Leaving Home? — perhaps by some frankness even bridge the gap in the old friendship? It really did seem that some such thoughts must have lurked in his mind, judging by this sense within him now.

Then, out of blankness and frustration, the young man felt slowly rising a deep exasperation, a mighty grievance. So he shook himself at once, donned his mask quickly while yet he could, and said in quite a natural-seeming voice: —

"But I'm afraid I've bored you horribly with these purely literary troubles. And, by the way, — speaking of realism versus romance just now, — how are Donald and Miss Carson getting on these days?"

She appeared a little surprised at the change of topic, but replied easily: "Oh! — very well, indeed, I believe. They're together somewhere nearly every evening. — But why —"

"Really! That relieves me — knowing your serious interest in that affair. I was beginning to fear Donald might be wandering a little in his affections."

"Wandering? No — how do you mean?"

"Well, he has seemed quite attentive to your pretty cousin of late, don't you think?"

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Then the Secretary turned her head again, sharply. And it hardly improved Charles Garrott's frame of mind to perceive that, of all he had said in the strangely talkative drive, this alone had really touched her: this, which affected her personal purposes, her Own ambitions.

"Angela? Why, not that I know of! I did n't know he'd seen her at all — except one casual meeting, perhaps!"

"I've happened to see them driving together from time to time, as I plod about on my rounds. But no doubt it's all quite casual, as you say, since you've heard nothing about it."

"You have? But please tell me! — where have you seen them together — and when?"

He cited particulars from his collection, damaging ones, though perhaps not so damaging as he could have made them had not self-interest restrained. Still, something in him was not displeased as he saw his old friend's concern steadily deepening.

"I'm surprised, and — frankly, I'm sorry," she said slowly, at the end. "Of course Angela's a dear girl, very sweet and attractive, but — I should n't like Donald to see too much of her — in view of my other hopes! I've had good reason to think that he's really interested in Helen, and she in him. — Well!" she went on, after a small pause, "this seems to require some diplomatic management. Donald has engagements for every evening this week — but —"

"It's in the daytime that he meets Miss Flower. At least, I don't think she takes the Fordette out at night."

Beside him on the padded seat, Mary sat silent, a little pucker between the dark brows which set such a question-mark in her colorless face. Considering her formidable strength, it was odd how all but ethereal, how sincerely girlish, she could look at times.

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"Well, Donald's going to New York on Friday," she said, thoughtfully. "He's had a fine offer from Blake & Steinert — to go into the firm, had you heard? — so fine that I think he'd have taken it, and thrown over Wyoming, if I had let him! He'll be gone nearly a week. Then, about the time he comes back, I've arranged to have him invited to Creekside, the Kingsleys' place at Hatton, for a week-end party. Helen's to be there — I've really been hoping great things of that. Meantime," she rounded up efficiently, "there are the afternoons. Perhaps I could start him to playing golf, or something of that sort. . . . I suppose, of course, you're too busy to —"

"I?" said the young man, hastily. "Oh, I fear I can offer nothing to rival Miss Angela's attractions just now."

"Does it look as serious as that? Well," she said, with a sort of determined friendliness, "all the more reason that I should like to have your help."

He hardly repressed a sardonic laugh. "Are you asking me to help *you*?"

"What's so extraordinary about that?"

"Not a thing, of course. I was n't certain I'd understood you, that was all."

But it appeared that the idea of helping this young woman had ceased to have the smallest pulling power now. Rather, there was bitterness in the thought that she still seemed ready to use him when she could.

He said, with savage urbanity: "Perhaps you might get Donald a motor-cycle, and encourage him to practice up as a Speed Demon."

The remark was received in entire silence. It was probably true that she literally did not understand him. All the same, his displeasure grew.

"But really," he continued sweetly, "if these two young

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people are so strongly attracted to each other — love at first sight, who knows? — really, is it judicious to interfere? Don't you believe in elective affinities at all?"

"As a matter of fact, you know, Donald was greatly attracted to Helen, at first sight. And as for Angela, I'm certain —"

"You see," he interrupted, stung beyond all calculations, "my personal idea is that Miss Angela would probably make him a more suitable wife."

That unwisdom made everything worse at once; for Mary, after one glance at him and a stare out the window, said in a changed, "diplomatic" tone: "Well, I must n't let you misunderstand me, at any rate. You know, I've agreed with you perfectly, all along, that she's thoroughly charming. . . . And, by the way, she likes *you* so much, too!"

Charles froze instantly.

"In fact, she thinks you're much more attractive than Donald — or did, just a little while ago. I have her word for it. So if she's seeing a good deal of Donald just now, I don't believe it's from affinity, necessarily!"

"Indeed?"

"She was inquiring about you the last time I saw her — saying that she never saw you now, asking if you ever spoke of her to me, and so on. I told her, of course, you did, and repeated some of the compliments you paid her —"

Again he interrupted her, now with some slipping of his mask. It was true, to be just, that Mary Wing knew nothing of his long struggles to elude the Fordette. Nevertheless, her patent desire to hand him back to it, merely by way of furthering a little her plans for Donald, seemed somehow the last straw. A friendly reward for magnanimity this! And it may be some touch of purely male chagrin enhanced the phil-

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osophic anger, that any woman should be thus eager to pass on him, Charles, to another.

"I believe my remark was that I considered Miss Angela a suitable wife for Donald. So far as I am aware, I do not come into the conversation at all. If your suggestion is that I should step in and take her off his hands — in order to help you — may I beg you to put such an idea from your head, once and for all?"

It was clear that he astonished her: made her indignant as well. Her scrutiny of him was direct and sharp: but she did not speak at once, as if weighing her words or firmly counting ten, and when she did speak, her manner bore evidences of strong control.

"You are rather puzzling to-day. I should like to know what you have on your mind. 'Take her off his hands!' Do you really think that 's quite the way to speak of a girl who —"

"I don't, indeed. But the idea was your own, was it not?"

"Mine! — why, how can you! I only —"

"Then why not let things take their natural course, as I suggested?"

On that, turning her head away from him, she said quietly, too quietly in fact: "I 'm afraid you would n't understand now, if I were to tell you."

That seemed to bring the conversation to a natural *impasse*. And then — as if no touch were to be wanting from this embittering hour — at just this instant, as Eustace slowed down to make his curve into Olive Street, the two estranged friends in the old lady's limousine found themselves looking together into the eyes of their common and particular enemy, Mary's former principal at the High School.

Mr. Mysinger, her conqueror and his own, no less, was approaching down the sunny promenade. He gave the two in the

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car just one full surveying stare; then casually moved his gaze a degree or two away. But, as he dropped back out of the range of vision, Charles could have sworn he saw a smile springing under the glossy mustache he had once pledged himself to pull off.

But this time, he felt no such bitter hostility toward the victorious foe as had shaken him on that other remembered occasion. There was a transient flicker of the Old Blood toward his temples, a brief iciness within, and that was all. Recalling the childish folly of the setting-up exercises, he experienced a cold mirth: "Why, of course, she'd say she'd have licked Mysinger herself, if she'd considered it worth the trouble!" And, at his old friend's side, Charles had the most disloyal thought of her that had ever knocked at his mind. Was Mysinger, perhaps, so entirely to blame for the ancient friction? Had he, Charles, been principal of the High School, did he think he would have found Mary so acceptable, so perfect, a subordinate? . . .

Assisting her to alight at her door, the young man inquired politely if she had yet found a tenant for her flat. Mary replied, quite distantly, he thought, that the John Wensons were going to take it. His comment was that old Jack should make her a fine tenant. He courteously sent his regards to her mother; he amiably wished her a good-afternoon.

And then he shut the limousine door on himself so hard that the glass shook.

XVIII

FINDING himself unable to reflect with pleasure or pride upon this interview, Charles resolved, within the hour, not to reflect upon it at all. For the fourth time — or was it the fourteenth? — he determined to think of Egoettes no more. At least, he had given his warning, unthanked, and that ended it. He might rest upon the ground that the match would really be a very suitable thing; or, conversely, he might argue that Donald was just amusing himself a little with Angela, at odd times, while at heart perfectly true to Helen, etc. But chiefly he stood upon the warning which made all this Mary Wing's concern henceforward, and no longer his. And, bent upon bringing his last relation and duty in the case to a clear, honorable conclusion, Charles sallied from the Studio next morning with the new "Marna" tucked under his arm.

But there seemed to hang a curse over everything connected with this unhappy book. Because he had brought it with him to-day, the azure heavens became overcast at noon; at two o'clock, it was drizzling dismally; and all that afternoon, and all the next day, the cold rain poured in torrents. To call in such home-keeping weather would be a wanton provocation: Charles hung off, yet again. The third day proved well worth waiting for, a brilliant, blue, and tingling day, gloriously inviting to all owners of vehicles. And now a new plague befell. When Charles emerged from Miss Grace's on this day, his face firmly set for his duty, the Big Six was n't there.

The discovery was most disconcerting. The young man

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stood irresolute on the Choristers' steps, "Marna" clutched in his hands, gazing up and down the street.

Unfortunately, Eustace's habits had not been kept completely virtuous by his light duties with his mistress's tutor. The grinning black rascal had got himself pleasantly illuminated the first day, and had remained in that state with considerable consistency ever since. However, being kept excellently tipped, he had never failed to meet an appointment before; and Charles, eyeing the spot where Jehu should have been, but was n't, was most unpleasantly struck with his own sense of helplessness ensuing. It really appeared that soft custom had made him as dependent on the limousine as if he lacked the means of locomoting for himself.

He scanned the horizon. Many vehicles rolled up and down Washington Street, but his own swift chariot was nowhere among them.

Then, while he irritably hesitated between telephoning to the garage, on the off chance that Eustace might be there, and tamely abandoning the enterprise once more, a third alternative, ingenious in its way, quite unexpectedly offered itself. Down the street came jogging a carriage for hire — empty. Providence seemed to be directing straight at him, Charles. And, by chance, he knew this old carriage well; Walter Taylor's carriage, it was; many and many a time had it driven him forth to parties when he was young and gay.

On the first quick impulse, Charles went springing down the Choristers' steps.

"Walter! . . . Here, you old rascal! Where 're you going?"

"At libbuty, suh!" cried Walter Taylor, drawing rein with alacrity. "Whar mout you wish to be druv, Mist' Garrott?"

"Well! — Perhaps I'll let you —"

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The young man hesitated, fractionally, struck with the rattletrap's supreme lack of dignity. Then, with decision, he plucked open the weather-beaten door.

"One seven East Center. And look sharp now!" he ordered, stepping in — "I'm in a hurry. Mind you don't stop for anything!"

"Yassuh! Sutney, suh!" said Walter Taylor, with great enthusiasm, and gave his old nag a prodigious wallop.

So it fell out that, for his first call at the Flowers' since the bridge-party — his party-call, his book-call, and his call about the Kiss — Charles Garrott fared forth in a closed livery hack.

Inside the hack, Charles laughed briefly; and then at once began to react. In the fine afternoon, numbers of people were abroad. Strangers seemed to look with surprise at the apparently able-bodied young man who liked thus to trot around in a hack; chance acquaintances were seen to smile in passing; more than one called out derisive remarks. Charles himself questioned whether his employment of the hack was quite reasonable. . . . Seemed inconsistent till you stopped to think. Inasmuch as he was going straight to see Angela, why, it might be asked, all this elaborate precaution in advance? Well — there was really no inconsistency there; no, none at all. He was *not* going to see Angela; he was only going to pay The Call, while she was out in her Fordette — a totally different matter. But this raised fresh questions of consistency: how was he going to hold his position that Angela was just the wife for Donald, if he himself would only go to see her in a hack?. . . Well, the answer to that was simple enough, too. Donald was a marrying man, while he, Charles (though probably still liked best) emphatically was not. Moreover, Donald was a primitive male, while he, Charles, was a

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modern. . . . Or, no, perhaps he was n't a modern, exactly — but — yes, he *was* a modern, a true one, while others he could name were only self-centered extremists. . . .

At Gresham Street, the hack turned south, at Center it turned back west. Walter Taylor, up aloft, began to look for his street-number. And then, while Charles still argued uneasily about the spiritual differences between Donald and himself, his eye all at once fell on Donald in the flesh, close by — striding up Center Street homeward on his way from the office he left so early now.

The sight of the youth at this moment was unwelcome to Charles. Instinctively, he sat far back in the hack. But Donald, unluckily turning at the sound of wheels, had caught sight of him; and he stopped stock-still on the sidewalk at once, staring with unaffected interest.

"Well, I'll be darned!" he said, as the carriage came up with him. "Whither away in the sea-going, old top?"

Unwillingly appearing at the window, Charles said: "Well, Donald. . . . Just driving around."

"Driving! — Thought you must be going to a funeral, at least," said Donald, stepping along to keep up. "Here! Stop the blamed thing! I want to look you over."

"You don' want me to stop, does you, Mist' Garrott?" bawled down Walter Taylor from the box.

"No, I told you! Go on!"

Walter cut his nag a mighty crack, and with the same movement drew rein sharply.

"Here's yo' number, suh!" he cackled, with great merri-ment. "One seven, like you said! Yassuh!"

So the hack halted, and the fare reluctantly discharged himself. His friend, having come up, halted, too, a few feet away; it was noted that his gibing expression had suddenly altered.

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And then Charles understood instantly that this fool's destination was no other than his own.

"Oho!" said Donald, slowly and suspiciously. "So this is where you were driving around to?"

Controlling an immense complication of sensations, Charles said coldly: "You mean you're going to — the Flowers', too?"

"You've guessed it!" retorted the engineer, with a slight touch of consciousness. And he added, assuming an indifferent air: "Just got to stop by and leave a book Miss Flower lent me."

And then, for the first time, Charles noticed the volume in a gaudy wrapper protruding beneath Donald's sturdy arm. The coincidence was remarkable, to say the least of it. It was also exceedingly annoying.

"Time, too," quoth the primitive male. "I've had it since before I went to Wyoming."

On Angela's sidewalk, the two young men stood gazing hard at each other. Whatever the argument in the case, it was surely Charles's higher nature that spoke at last, icily but firmly: —

"I am going here to return a book, and also to pay a call — on the family. If you wish, I will return your book for you."

"Could n't think of troubling you, Charlie, old top."

"As you like, of course —"

"But as I'm going in, anyway, why need you stop at all? Glad to take charge of your book for you. Save you a little hack-fare."

To this, Charles disdained reply. So the two members of the coterie, with their books to return under their arms, stepped up the bricked walkway side by side.

Charles rang the Flowers' loud little bell. Having done so, he turned on the shabby verandah, with the intention of look-

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ing Donald hostilely up and down. But he found that Donald was already looking him up and down, in the most hostile manner conceivable. Then the youth's dullness, his grotesque conception of a male rivalry here, his impervious blind asininity, — all this acting upon the original concern about the Call, produced a sudden infuriation. Speech flowed from Charles: —

“Of all the laughing jackasses that ever broke loose from a zoo, I do think you take the cake, Manford. How you keep from falling off bridges, or butting out the pan where your brain ought to be on stone-copings, passes all understanding. If I did n't have you to look at, I would n't believe it possible that an ordinary well-meaning chucklehead could deteriorate so horribly, just in a week or two.”

Donald seemed slightly nonplussed by this attack. All that he could muster in reply was some very poor childish stuff, introduced by shakings of his head and “significant” tappings of his forehead.

“So that's why they sent him around here in a closed carriage — oho! Old Doc Flower's an alienist — forgot that! H'm! Funny how it runs in the family. First old Blenso, now poor Charlie-boy . . .”

Then a servant opened the door, and relieved the high tension instantly by saying, in reply to two simultaneous questions, that Miss Flower was out.

Donald looked slightly crestfallen. Charles's look was the opposite. The youth's presence here had strongly suggested that Angela was known to be in, despite the fine weather. When the Flowers' servant — answering Donald's “Oh, she's out, is she?” — said further that Miss Angela had gone driving with a genaman, his relief rose to genuine thanksgiving. And then Donald cleared the air completely by cavalierly

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handing in his book, with only his card for acknowledgment, and clattering away down the steps. Evidently, he sought a little amusement here, and nothing more.

Charles himself hesitated on the veranda. The thing was over and done with. The Call was formally and honorably paid. Perhaps he only wanted to do something different from Donald; perhaps he thought to mark signally his revised good opinion of Angela; or perhaps mere revulsion of feeling swung him into exuberant excesses. At any rate, in the very act of extending his book, he recalled a long-forgotten promise, and said suddenly, but tentatively: —

“And Dr. Flower? I suppose he’s out, too?”

“Him? Naws’, he’s in,” said the slatternly and ill-favored woman.

“What! — he is? Are you sure?”

“Ef yo’ want to see him, walk in.”

“Ah — well, I’ll just stop and see him for a few moments. That is, *if* he happens to be at leisure.”

So the hack waited in front of the Flowers’, and Charles stepped (for the first time on his own motion) over the threshold of Angela’s Home.

He felt that this was a superfluous proceeding; it turned out considerably worse. Having entered the Home, he found himself abruptly plunged into the middle of it, as it were. In fact, the impromptu extension of the Call to Dr. Flower, besides everything else that could be said against it, proved as inopportune as could well have been imagined.

The *contretemps* indicated was due to the servant (Luemma, in short), who apparently did not believe in announcing visitors, or perhaps had never heard of the civil custom. She merely stood by, in a disapproving, suspicious sort of way, while the caller deposited his book on the hatstand beside

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Donald's, and removed his overcoat and gloves. And then she said, with a manner no whit better than her appearance:—

“Walk this way.”

Charles, necessarily assuming that this was the rule of the house, walked that way.

The hall of the Home was narrow and dark, the pervading atmosphere noted as somewhat cheerless. It was not lighted and decked for festivity now, as on the famous night of the bridge-party: parlor and dingy little dining-room, glimpsed in passing, wore (to the author's sensitive eye) a depressing air, vaguely suggestive of failure, incompetence, and the like. But that, of course, is the front that poverty so commonly wears: all the more reason that a hard-worked Temporary Spinster, or vicarious Home-Maker, should wish to get out sometimes, and go and meet her friends. . . .

However, Charles also was conscious of a wish to get out. Why was he doing this, exactly? Really, now, what was the sense of it?

The black worthy was leading him toward a shut door in the dusk beyond the dining-room: the office, clearly, of that patientless provider, Angela's father. Now the young man was aware of voices behind that door, or rather of a voice. It was a woman's voice, pitched in rather a complaining key, and for the first second Charles thought, with a start, that it was Angela's. It was n't, of course; but his steps instinctively slackened.

“Ah—the Doctor seems to be engaged—after all,” he threw out, in lowered tones. “Perhaps I'd better come another day.”

“Naws', he ain't engaged. Just him and Miz' Flower talkin'.”

Charles, truth to tell, was scarcely reassured by that as-

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surance: he did not like to run in on a strange couple this way, in particular when the lady was speaking in that tone. But his sour guide had not paused. And now there came a different voice through the thin door: a man's voice, faintly humorous, faintly sarcastic, and considerably weary. It was recognizably the voice of the esteemed Doctor, and it said, with fatal distinctness: —

“Is it possible you forget, madam, that you're speaking to your husband and the father of your children?”

If the feet of the reluctant caller had lagged before, they now stopped short. One of his overminds perceived instantly that the strange words he had had no business to hear possessed a sort of distorted familiarity, like a horrid parody of a sentiment known and established; but as to that, there was not time to speculate now. What was only too plain was that something like a domestic scene was afoot in the office of the home, making the intrusion of a stranger peculiarly inapropos.

“Don't! — I'll not stop now!” he murmured hastily, and sharply. “Just take these cards here, and —”

But the maladroit blackamoor was already opening the door; and the young man's last stand against the Call was put down with a brief and surly: —

“Genaman to see Doctor. Walk in.”

That settled the matter, beyond any undoing. Charles Garrott was a caller now, whether or no. With an embarrassment such as none of his many calculations about this hour had anticipated, he stepped blundering in upon Angela's unwitting parents.

Dr. Flower's small office was dark; its light came only through a single window from a narrow air-well. Hence, the forms of the lady and gentleman in it were at first but dimly apprehended. Having turned in their seats at the sound which

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disturbed their privacy, they seemed to be peering together, in silent inquiry, at the intruder. It was the intruder's move, obviously; and, being in for it, he did his hasty best to pluck a hearty calling manner over his decided malease.

"Oh! — good-afternoon, Dr. Flower! It's Garrott, Charles Garrott — perhaps you may remember —"

Now the dim forms were rising together, the tall Doctor's with a jerk: —

"Ah, yes! Howdo, Mr. Garrott! Quite —"

"I hope I'm not interrupting! I stopped to return some books, and — ah — finding that Miss Angela was out, I thought I'd take the opportunity —"

"Quite so — very kind! Come in! But I'd better make a light? Take seat, sir. Mrs. Flower?"

The Doctor's manner, of course, was natively too queer to betray anything, even astonishment at the Call. But it was not observed that Angela's mother bore any of the marks of a lady surprised in the middle of a "scene," and this was a relief, unquestionably; the parents did n't know him for an eavesdropper, at any rate. Agreeably accepting his introduction of himself, Mrs. Flower was bestowing upon him a dim but comforting smile, and a limp hand to shake.

"I feel that I already know you, Mr. Garrott. I've so often heard my daughter speak of you," she said, in the slightly plaintive voice he had heard through the door. "She'll be so sorry to miss you. . . ."

The hearty Charles spoke his little mendacity.

"But a friend of hers from Mitchellton is here to-day to see her — Daniel Jenney — and Angela has just taken him out for a little drive in her car, to see the town. I feel sure she'll be in soon, though."

Mr. Jenney's presence in the city was the best news heard

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by Charles in many a day. All in all, things were n't going off so badly. And, if he knew Angela in the least, she would not be in soon, either; he had thought of all that on the verandah.

Then the Doctor's match caught the gas with a faint *pop*, and the little room filled with a high white light. In the sudden brightness, the caller's eye noted two unrelated matters almost together. One was merely an ash-tray upon the mantel. The other was Mrs. Flower herself, and her unexpected resemblance to her pretty young daughter. Line for line, the two faces were different enough, no doubt, and this one was no longer young. But to a stranger's eye, the general likeness was rather remarkable; Charles was much struck with it.

"Sit down, sir," said the Doctor, and contributed his match to the ash-tray.

"Ah, thank you."

But of course he could not sit down while Angela's mother remained standing and conversing with him; and she did so stand and converse a moment or so, rather idly, seemingly uncertain whether she intended to stay or go, and trying to make up her mind. Once or twice she glanced at her husband undecidedly, as if he might have something to do with the matter; and no wonder. But her final verdict was that she was to go; and Charles was rather glad that it worked out this way, though why he hardly knew.

Mrs. Flower's decisive remark was that she must get on with her household duties. She gave Charles her limp hand again, again mentioned her daughter's distress, if she missed him; she bestowed upon him another pretty and somewhat significant smile; and then faded out of the Call, leaving behind a vague impression of feminine inadequacy and a button missing from her black waist.

So the young man was left with the worthy Doctor, who

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could speak so sarcastically to a defenseless woman, his wife. And for a space he found the tête-à-tête heavy going, indeed, and was more oppressed than ever with the essential meaninglessness of it all.

Angela's father did not look like a brute, but only dryer, queerer, shabbier, than before. He jerked his neck more, looked more unrelated to his environment. He was very civil, but he cocked his eye too much toward the ceiling, felt too little responsibility as to keeping a conversation going. Charles's efforts (hearty enough, despite the counter-feelings going on within him) seemed to bound off dead from that juiceless, withdrawn manner. Having refused a cigar (there was a little talk about smoking, but he could n't keep it going), he proposed for discussion the Doctor's son Wallie, his education, abilities as a chemist, skill as a lamp-repairer, etc. The topic promised well, and did well for a couple of minutes, but petered out mysteriously and beyond resurrection. The Doctor's work out at the Medical School yielded almost nothing; the weather enjoyed but a brief and fitful run. Presently, Charles found himself fairly driven to Mary Wing, and her imminent departure to lead her own life; and this subject won a real success, though not of a sort he could take much satisfaction in. It quickly developed that Angela's parent held ante-bellum views on Woman, which he put forward with some dry zest, in the strange backhanded fashion noted by Charles in their previous meeting. After a very few exchanges, the old eccentric was delivering himself of paragraphs like this: —

“Ah, you throw out that suggestion? An interesting idea! — quite so!” (Charles had thrown out no suggestion of any sort.) “Your observation is that the Lord has formed woman specifically for the needs of family and the home — quite so! —

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and that efforts to change her destiny seem to result in constitutional perversion? Well, sir, I dare say the physicians would support your contention there, too. Who knows?"

Even "Marna," even Mary Wing, had never made Charles so conservative as this. Oddly enough, he found the Doctor's criticisms unwelcome; it was his turn to let a subject die from malnutrition. In the pause, he considered whether he had not called long enough now. About to rise, he chanced to note a worn volume of Henderson's "Stonewall Jackson" lying open on the table, and asked, with little hope, if the Doctor had read it. The old codger replied: "I am reading it now for the seventh time, sir." And to the young man's agreeable surprise, he at once uncocked his eye from the ceiling (where he seemed to have meant to leave it permanently), and began to talk along almost like a regular person.

During the remainder of the Call, conversation flowed very satisfactorily. It appeared that the War was one of this old codger's subjects, even as Woman was Charles's; and he talked well, too, now that he cared to, criticizing strategy as one having authority, revealing, behind that spare, intensely conservative manner, flashes of broad outlook and incisive speech which might have helped to explain why the Medical School had been glad to draw this man from Mitchellton to its staff. But the truth was that Charles Garrott heard scarcely a word of this excellent discourse. Once he had got Angela's father fairly going, he became captured and fascinated by a totally independent line of thought.

In short, the young man's gaze had returned to almost the first thing he had definitely noticed in the Home, to wit, the ash-tray on the Doctor's mantel.

The ash-tray was really a large saucer, or small plate, and the intriguing and really exciting thing about it was that it

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contained the remains of scarcely less than a dozen cigars. Just before he made the lucky remark about Henderson's "Life," the caller had inadvertently discovered two more cigar-ends, poised perilously on the mantel's edge; this it was that had started him reacting yet again. For, considering that the Doctor was out a large part of the day, lecturing, it appeared incredible that he could have achieved such astonishing results since morning. Rather, the mantel had the air of having stood undisturbed for some little time. . . .

"If those men," he was saying, "had but shot another way, that night at Chancellorsville —"

"Ah, sir! the vast 'ifs' of history. And none bigger than that, it may be. Yet, as I say . . ."

From the large heaped saucer, with its ring of spilled ashes, the detective eye flitted over the room, briefly, somewhat guiltily, yet uncontrollably. It received an impression of dust on the table, dust on the bookshelves, disorder pervasively, and a waste-basket brimful of trash. Finally, the eye rested anew on the Doctor himself, with his frayed collar and joyless mien. And all the time, under the mask of the caller, a question was irresistibly rising and thrusting itself upon the attention of the authority: What housekeeper had charge of this untidy little room, what home-maker was in the business of supplying beauty and charm to this jaded gentleman?

Unaware that he was being thought of in these terms, Angela's father reverted austere to the Seven Days' fighting around Richmond. . . .

The scientific inquiry had a perfectly proper answer, of course. In the truest sense, Mrs. Flower was the housekeeper in question; that faded belle, with the button off her waist, owed the beauty and charm due in this quarter. Not for nothing did she have that distinctly inefficient voice. And the

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moment Charles thought of that voice, his mind, with a sort of jump, made a link, and he understood at once why the Doctor's strange speech, eavesdropped by him outside the door, had seemed to have the quality of a parody. Of course! This dry husband, with the sick-man's face, had merely been giving back, in a masculinized version, a reminder not infrequently heard on the lips of womanly women, when married. Before he had invented that ironic retort, how often had Angela's father heard it said: *I'm your wife, and the mother of your children*. . . .

"And what," the civil caller said, "do you think of Mary Johnston's picture of Jackson? I assume, of course, you're familiar with —"

"A brilliant achievement, sir. Indeed, astonishing — for a woman," said the conservative Doctor, jerking his neck; and resumed.

But the young authority found his reactions oddly and increasingly disturbing, and shortly rose to go. He had become certain, abruptly, that he had party-called long enough.

His eccentric host, who had appeared so dryly indifferent to his coming, seemed, on the whole, to regret his departure. And Charles, perceiving this, found himself feeling rather sorry for him. But he showed his sympathies, not by offering to stay longer or to come again, but by inviting Angela's father to lunch with him at Berringer's, one day very soon at his convenience.

"I feel that we should further the acquaintance," he said, as they shook hands, "because of — ah — my long friendship for you — that is, for your wife's cousin."

And then he had a new surprise; for, though the Doctor's lips twitched a little at his correction, showing that he was not

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altogether devoid of humor, it was with instant seriousness that he said: —

"I do insist upon the distinction, you allege? Well, I'm free to say to you, sir, that I have but scant sympathy with these fantastic modern notions. If all women did as my wife's young cousin does, what, pray, would become of the Home?"

"Ah, what?" said Charles.

And as he thought of Mary Wing's charming and beautifully kept sitting-room, he seemed to feel his head going round. Surely, he had never before seen conservatism so magnificent as this.

"Meanwhile, come in again, sir, when you find time. I have few callers, and have appreciated your visit —"

"Yes! — thank you!"

"My daughter will be sorry —"

And then, as the Doctor opened the door, and his lusterless eye looked out, he added with an approach to grave pleasure in his voice: —

"Ah, here is Angela now — just in time."

The caller's eye went slipping down the hall; and so it was. In the light of the open front door, her rural swain behind her, the young home-maker stood by the hatstand, examining the two returned books she had just found there. What chance had brought her back thus early, cutting off his retreat? Had she passed and seen his hack standing there, and wondered?

But, curiously, Charles's bachelor shrinking from this re-meeting seemed suddenly to have vanished. All his determined championship of the Type, dating back to the Redmantle Club, all his personal sense of honorable obligation, had mysteriously thinned to nothing in half an hour in Dr. Flower's office. In some way that defied analysis, the interior of the Home seemed to have wiped out Angela's girlish claim, the ash-tray

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had overcome the Kiss. And Charles, bidding her father farewell, went walking down the narrow hall with a tread firm as a soldier's.

Angela had turned at the sound of voices; she stood gazing somewhat uncertainly into the dimness (for she was a little short-sighted without the opera-glasses, and perhaps this was only a patient). The instant of recognition of her friend was marked with an exclamation, almost a cry, of pleasure; and she started toward him with the happiest surprised welcome.

The re-meeting was effected by the hatstand, where Charles had stood on the day he had borrowed the book he now came to return. Water had flowed under London Bridge since then. Mr. Jenney, owner of the celebrated ring, was presented. He was a long-legged, gangling, curly-headed youth, with a face that was beautiful in its way, no less; and it must have been a frank face, too, since Charles, the observer, immediately had the fellow's whole secret. Here was Mr. Jenney's fair ideal, his high star and lady of dreams; and his full reward for his pure devotion was to be kept hanging on, a masculine anchor to windward — just in case, as they say. Still, he might prove the *deus ex machina* of the issue yet.

At the moment, however, little was seen of Mr. Jenney, since, almost in the first breath, his star said: "Oh, Dan, father's in now, and he'll want *so* to see you!" — and Mr. Jenney straightway withdrew obediently. One gathered that obedience was his fatal quality.

Thus the unheroic Charles confronted his Temporary Spinster at last, in her dark home-hall. And she, not guessing the new philosophic resistance within him, said, with the gayest confident air, and no little archness, too: —

"Well, Mr. Garrott! . . . Did you decide to pay your party-call?"

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Charles smiled.

"I've been promising myself to come in for some time," he said pleasantly. "I had several excellent excuses, you see. For one thing, there was your book, which I've appropriated all this time —"

"Oh, that! I just saw it there — and thought I must have missed you! That would have been too mean, after all this time!" She glanced toward the hatstand, adding: "And — Mr. Manford gave you that other one to bring back, I suppose?"

"No — ah — we came together, but, of course, he left when he found that you were out. I wanted especially to pay my respects to your father, so —"

"I'm awfully glad he kept you for me. . . . How are you now? You don't know how I've missed you, since you had to stop walking entirely!"

"I've been extremely well, thank you. Or — at least — I've been pretty well —"

"Oh, I know you have n't been well! — you just try to make light of it! Mr. Manford told me you were breaking yourself down from overwork — you ought n't to do it! And then that night when I phoned, and your Secretary said you were sick from not taking any exercise, I was worried, truly I was! I wanted to write you a little note — but —"

"A mere temporary indisposition, not worth a moment of your thought," said Mr. Garrott. He was wholly recovered now.

"I'm so glad. You really do look well! It's been ages since I've seen you! But why," she said, laughing up at him prettily, "am I keeping you standing at the door like this! Come in the parlor."

"I'm sorry, but I really can't, thank you. I must be going."

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She stopped in complete surprise. "Going! Oh, you must n't go *now*!—when I've just come in! Why, you *could* n't! —"

"My time's up, you see, and more. Writing," said Charles sententiously, "is a dreadful taskmaster. But I've explained all that —"

"I know! — but you're here now! You can surely take a *little* time, Mr. Garrott — when I have n't seen you for days and days —"

"I've already overstayed my scant allowance, you see, with your father. But I'm glad to have had a little glimpse of you, at any rate."

On the whole, he had sought to speak in his usual voice and air; but now he saw that his new power of firmness had disclosed itself to her not too sensitive ear. The liquid eyes under the becoming new hat regarded him with sudden inquiry, puzzled and speculative. . . .

To think seriously ill of this girl, because, perhaps, she was not an enthusiastic cleaner of the parental home, was not in Charles, the man, whatever the authority might have to say. Her soft and unlessoned youthfulness, confronting him, disarmed all criticism. But the chance resemblance to her plaintive mother had seemed, oddly, to strike him much deeper. Looking down at this virginal sweet freshness, by the hatstand and the books, the young man had been full of the elusive sense that as the daughter looked and charmed now, so the mother had looked once; and beyond her present air of alluring femininity, he seemed persistently to be seeing Angela at fifty, sitting idle in an unswept room and continually reminding a worn-out husband of her sacrifices and her service. . . . Pure fantasy, was it, a fiction-writer's imagining born of a superficial likeness? Or was there a deeper, a more romantic, kinship between the girl who set so naïve an estimate

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on the value of her kiss, and the woman who would plume herself through an indolent lifetime on the ancient history of her maternity? . . .

The girl opened her mouth to speak: but there came a welcome diversion. A step was heard on the wooden verandah, and the two young people, turning their heads together, saw a liveried servant at the still open door, bowing, speaking:—

“Miss Flower, marm?”

“Yes — I am Miss Flower.”

“Fum Mr. Tilletts, marm,” said the servant, extending a note. “And he say please don’t you trouble to write, if you ’d kindly send an answer by me, marm.”

“Oh! All right.”

Having said, “Excuse me, Mr. Garrott,” Angela opened and glanced through her note, and then remarked: “Mr. Tilletts wants me to go to the theater with him to-night. How nice!”

Her back to the servant, she made a little deprecating face at Mr. Garrott; but her voice seemed pleasurably stirred all the same, and her answer to the chauffeur was:—

“Thank Mr. Tilletts, and say Miss Flower’ll be very glad, indeed, to go, and will be ready at quarter past eight.”

Charles wondered afterward if the opportune Tilletts had not subtly assisted his own withdrawal; but for the moment it rather seemed otherwise. While Angela spoke to the servant, he had turned hastily toward his overcoat; and now her hand fell upon his arm, with just a touch of the spoiled darling air, or at least with that added confidence which comes to a girl with these concrete evidences of her success.

“No, you must n’t! Don’t go yet. *Please!*”

“I ’m compelled to, unluckily. I very rarely allow myself the pleasure of calling at all, you know, and —”

“But you *have* allowed yourself the pleasure, now, Mr.

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Garrott! Oh! — don't be so *firm*! Come in — for only a minute! You can surely spare me a minute — when I ask you to specially —”

“It is literally impossible.”

Angela had extended her small hand to lead him into the parlor. Now she let it fall at her side, and stood looking at him with a conscious expression on her face, a pretty expression, but one that he scarcely liked. Of course both of them knew that it was by no means literally impossible for Mr. Garrott to come in, for only a minute. But doubtless a womanly girl could be trusted to find an explanation for his peculiar speeches that plucked their stingers from them, as it were.

“You're so strange. You're displeased with me, I can see that. Why? — because I was n't in when you called? Why, I'm nearly always out on fine afternoons!”

“I know that,” ventured the young man.

“If you'd just told me in advance. . . . Don't you know I'd never have gone out with Dan Jenney, if I'd dreamed you were going to call?”

He knew this also, only too well; but this time he only said: “A caller must take his chances, of course. By the way, let me thank you very much, again, for lending me that book. I found it immensely interesting.”

“Oh! — ‘Marna’? I did n't want you to come just for that. . . . Did she make you think of Cousin Mary at all?”

He smiled distantly, turned away, and put on his overcoat.

This was done in entire silence; Angela urged him to stay no longer. But when he turned, hat in hand, to say good-bye, she stood confronting him again, very near. There was a faint flush on her smooth cheek; her woman's eyes were very bright; her look upon him was sweet, self-conscious, and wist-

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ful, oddly appealing. Rarely had he seen her look more girlishly desirable.

"Mr. Garrott, why have you always been different to me since that night — of my bridge-party?"

"Different?" queried Mr. Garrott.

"Oh, you know you have! You know you've never really got over what I said to you — and all that dreadful misunderstanding!"

And he knew then that this nice girl would go to her grave thinking of him as a lover whose confidence in his suit had been reft from him by a too sharp rebuke. Well, so be it. He was content that she should have that satisfaction: let that stand as a further liquidation of the old obligation, a bonus payment on the esteemed Kiss.

"You know you've never forgiven me!"

"I've never had anything to forgive you, Miss Flower."

"Then you've never believed I've forgiven you! I've tried to show you that I have, that I've truly appreciated all the nice things you've done for me — but you've still been different."

It was doubtless his imagination, but she seemed to be a little nearer as she said, with a pink and winsome hesitancy: —

"Can't I make you believe that I — I've really always been the same?"

Extending his hand, the voluntary celibate replied, with cheerful reassurance: "I believe it now, Miss Flower. Absolutely. Positively. And now I must run."

Angela did not seem to see the hand he offered. She continued to look at him, and something seemed to die out of her face, — a momentary expectancy, was it, or the mere native optimism of youth? Her gaze turned away from his face,

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turned back again; and then she suddenly gave a little laugh, an odd laugh, half angry, half sad: —

“Oh, I do think you're absolutely — *obtuse!*”

And Charles then knew that, whether she realized it or not, Angela was giving him up.

But still she did not see his farewell hand. Her eyes, going past him again, had become fixed with a new expression, arresting him, and now she said, in another tone, what he found perhaps the most interesting remark in the duologue: —

“Here's Mr. Manford back!”

Charles wheeled, with a little jump.

And sure enough, there, beyond the glass of the door, was the form of the young engineer, incredibly returning. Yes, there he came back again, poor, vain, grinning, flattered fool, who only the other day had said: “Charlie, she worries me.”

With one last look at Mr. Garrott, Angela turned to open the door for Mr. Manford. The greeting smile succeeded the good-bye reproach. And even in this disturbed moment, the writer's mind was subtly struck with the symbolism of that gesture: and once again this girl was a type to him, sister of a million sisters. Even so, must the womanly Spinster, through all her seeking days, turn from the man who does not desire her little offerings of beauty and charm, to the man who — well, possibly may. And it really was n't right, was n't fair. . . .

“Old Sherlock! — sees the Fordette outside — guesses who's at home now!” the man who possibly might was saying, with a tone of buoyant intimacy and a repellent smirk. “I thought you were n't going to forget me altogether! . . . Oh! And there's Charlie-boy, too! Feeling better, old top?”

Charles looked through him in silence.

But when Angela drifted by them into the parlor — for she avoided any formal farewell with her former principal friend

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— and he was passing Donald to the door, he bent and flung into the youth's long ear one futile taunt: —

“Fool, I suppose she lent you the sequel!”

Before the dingy little house of the Flowers', there stood a line of waiting vehicles. The passer would have said that a reception, or perhaps a wedding, was going on within.

To the left, Mr. Tilletts's shining sedan still stood at the broken curb. The driver, having paused to exchange badinage with Walter Taylor, was just mounting to his seat. Full in front of the house stood a conveyance more in character with the unpretentious street: Charles Garrott's aged hackney-coach, in short. On the other side, at the nose of the hack-horse and properly leading the procession, stood the stout little Fordette, resting now from its labors. There only lacked a bicycle for Mr. Jenney, and something — a donkey, let us say — to stand for Donald Manford.

And Angela, indeed, had accomplished this; here was her true creative work, here her self-expression made visible. She it was who, poor and obscure, with nobody to help her, had drawn these vehicles and these gentlemen thronging about her door.

“Where toe, suh?” cried Walter Taylor, flourishing his whip.

“Number 6 Olive Street.”

The fare spoke all but automatically, out of his new genuine disquiet. However, he corrected himself at once: “No — wait a minute.”

If his position that she was just the wife for Donald lay silently abandoned somewhere behind him: if the business could no longer be viewed as Donald's idle-hour amusement, but all at once had come to look decidedly serious: still, what

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under heaven was the use of giving Mary another and more rousing warning? He had warned Mary once, and what was the result? Two calls from Donald to Angela in the course of a single afternoon. No; if the labor of taking off was now to follow "putting on," it was clear that some hand far subtler than the too manly Mary's would have to do the job. And he knew whose hand was plainly indicated, too. . . .

And then the young man remembered, with a surprising uprush of relief and freedom, that this day was Friday, and Donald was off to New York to-night, within an hour or two. And the foolish youth would be gone a solid week, too, with Mr. Jenney and Mr. Tilletts left in possession of the field.

Thus, Walter Taylor, on his box, received a small surprise. Instead of giving him a new number, Mr. Garrott unexpectedly produced a dollar-bill from his pocketbook, and tossed it up to him with a sudden laugh.

"That's all, Walter. *I'll walk!*"

XIX

DONALD MANFORD'S absence in far-away New York saw the calendar into February. It was a month which for some time had held a fixed place in Charles's thought, as Mary Wing's last month at home. Now the days had brought him this new concern, by no means unrelated to Mary's impending departure. That Donald was his concern now, as well as hers, he had acknowledged, once and for all, in that moment of pause by the hack: and none saw more clearly than he that the acknowledgment was a damaging one, opening long vistas of annoying possibilities. Well it might be that all he had once planned and worried for himself, and much more, he would now have to plan and worry for his weak and amorous friend. And suppose Mary Wing went off, leaving the whole business still unsettled?

However, there was no use in borrowing trouble. For the present, Donald's well-wishers enjoyed an interlude of complete repose. And on or about the day of the simpleton's return to the danger-zone, it was recalled, he was to be whisked off again to the Helen Carson house-party, where all might end happily yet. Mary deserved her tittle of credit for that arrangement, at any rate. Charles, making the most of these peaceful days, reconsecrated himself to Letters and the finding of his Line.

Donald himself remained pleasantly unaware of the difficulties created by his unreliable antics. The youth was known to possess a common combination of characteristics: he had a novel-hero's chin and an underlying soft streak. Donald was

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a little ease-loving; he unconsciously slanted to the line of least resistance. As to work, Mary Wing, who had caught him young, had pretty well ironed out his softness; yet it seemed to persist even there. Witness his dallying for a moment with an "office proposition" in New York, at whatever emolument, when far larger professional opportunities awaited him in a Wyoming camp. As to getting himself married off, Donald's traits were obviously at once an advantage to his friends and an added risk: they seemed to indicate clearly that he or she who had his ear last, and took the strongest hand with him, would win the day. Doubtless his truest friends were most resolved that such hand should be theirs.

At any rate, the young squire's presentation of himself at the Wings', on the afternoon of the day he got back from New York, was by appointment strictly. It was Friday again, a week to a day from his two calls upon Angela. Donald "stopped by" Olive Street on his hurried way uptown. Having had a very strenuous part of a day in his office at Hoag, Hackett & Manford's, and having a number of things still to do before five o'clock, he designed to give, say, ten minutes to his call upon his more than sister. He gave thirty minutes, and emerged into the sunshine with a sobered face. And, on leaving Mary thus, almost the first person he saw next was Mary's special friend, Charles Garrott, bowling by.

The eyes of the young men met and Donald nodded gloomily. Charles, as it happened, was but taking a last use of his car, prior to the old lady's return on Monday. But Donald did not know that, and he thought, absently, what a fool old Charlie was to ride around this way all the time, when he had legs and could walk like a man. At the same moment, Charles, inevitably, was thinking what a fool Donald was, for exactly the opposite reason. Never again, it might be, would Charles

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Garrott see a bachelor walking Washington Street alone, without some vague sense of circumambient peril.

Charles had not expected to take up the new worries until after the match-making house-party; but the sight of Donald unprotected out there made an irresistible appeal to his higher nature, especially as no trouble to himself would be involved. Accordingly, he answered Donald's distrait salute with demonstrative smiles and signalings, and immediately fired an order through the speaking-tube. And the engineer, surprised, saw the splendid car of the old lady stop with a jerk, back, wheel, and come sliding up to his side at the curb.

"Well, old fellow! Glad to see you back!" said Charles, hospitably swinging open the door. "Hop in and let me drive you up! I want to hear about your trip."

Donald was faintly pleased by this unusual attentiveness. He was one of those extraordinary persons who never ride when it is possible to walk; on the other hand, he seldom turned away from the chance of a good talk about himself. And he was very short of time now, too, owing to his detention at the Wings'.

So he stepped into the limousine, his manner abstracted and distinctly consequential.

Charles, smiling slightly to himself, gave the address, and prompted: —

"You're just back, are n't you?"

"And off again at five twenty-two. And I've got two hours' unpacking and repacking to do before then."

"You *are* a traveler these days! What's this," inquired Charles, innocently — "another business trip?"

"House-party at the Kingsleys', down at Hatton. Tell your boy to skip along there, Charlie. I'm in a rush."

Amiably, Charles spoke into the mouthpiece: "Skip along

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there, Eustace. Mr. Manford's in a rush." And resuming he said, with an air of honest envy: "At the Kingsleys'! By George, that sounds pretty good! Congenial crowd, winter sports, dancing every night—you're in luck! Who's going along?"

Donald named the guests. It did not escape the observant Charles that he named Miss Carson last, after a perceptible pause and in a manner clumsily careless. Nothing escaped Charles, not Donald's sober face, certainly not the fact that he had just come from the Wings'. Now, with a thrill of satisfaction, he understood that Mary had been talking to the young light-o'-love at last, giving him to understand plainly where his duty lay. And this look of Donald's was precisely the right look, too: just the intensely self-important, nervous, faintly complacent, highly worried look of a man who has suddenly learned that he is going to be married directly.

He gave the strong Mary another large credit-mark, and continued: "Three days with that crowd!—how I'd like to get in! As for poor old Talbott—ha, ha!—he'll foam at the mouth when I tell him about this."

"What's he got to do with it?"

"Why, I thought you'd heard! Miss Carson knocked him flat with one look—that lunch of mine! He can't see anybody else since, poor chap. But he admits he does n't make any time at all."

"She's not the kind that takes to any whippersnapper that comes along."

His odious smugness delighted Charles. So did his fidgetings about, his hasty glances at his watch, his long solemn stares at himself in the little mirror.

"Poor old Talbott swears she must be interested in some-

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body else," laughed Charles. "But he confessed he could n't think of a man he knew who'd be at all likely to interest a girl like that — I either." And then, not to overdo it, he said interestedly: "But, Donald, what about Blake & Steinert?"

"Oh, I turned 'em down," said the coming fiancé, and briefly expanded. Of the fine old firm, he said: "They were associated with me on Hog Bay Breakwater." Old Blake was a prince; Steinert a crackerjack. They had raised their offer, so eager were they to get him, and insisted on leaving it open for him. He had seen all the shows, lunched at five clubs, "closed up several important deals," etc., etc.

Dipping up his watch again, Donald said suddenly: "Seen Mary lately?"

This being none of his business, Charles replied with a monosyllable.

"Anything wrong between you two?"

"Not that I'm aware of. . . . Great heavens! I'm a worker, my good fellow! I have n't time to fuss around house-partying — pop-calling — all the time! — Not, of course, that I don't wish I were going —"

"Well, you won't have much time to be pop-calling on Mary," reproved Donald, with his new responsible soberness. "Drop around this afternoon, Charlie, after your lessons. See if you can't cheer her up a little."

The limousine reeled off half a block before Charles answered: "Seems I'm behind the times again. What does Miss Mary need to be cheered up about, exactly?"

"What d' you s'pose now, Charlie? Going off to New York to live, herself; me off to Wyoming for two years at least; Aunt Ellen moving to North Carolina; home broken up — why, I tell you the thing is the worst kind of smash-up! I've just been with Mary — never saw her so blue in my life."

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Charles said, after another silence: "But she understood all that from the beginning, did n't she?"

"Understood — what's that got to do with it? Besides, you never understand things till you get right down to 'em. Take me," said Donald, recurring to his favorite subject with a frown. "I had n't an idea how much I was going to mind this business — ending it all here, moving off to the back side of nowhere to —"

"Well, don't be sentimental about it, for pity's sake! This is a realistic story we're living, or I miss my guess entirely. — When does Miss Mary leave?"

"Oh, about two weeks, I believe, but —"

"Two weeks!"

"Wensons want the flat around the 20th, I understand. We did n't speak of that just now — Mary'll tell you about it. Let's see," said Donald, fidgeting about and looking first out one window, then another. "Going to your mother's to-morrow, I suppose? Drop in this afternoon, Charlie — or to-night. And that's so! — you can take around a package for me, things I bought for Mary in New York — oh, neck-fichus, silk stockings — that sort of stuff."

But the thought of himself as Mary's cheerer-up at this juncture in her Career was bitterly ironic to Charles, and, answering curtly that he would be too busy to run errands this afternoon, he changed the subject at once. In short, when did Donald go to Wyoming? Unable to resist the opening, Donald said that he would probably start on March 15th; and so began to talk fitfully of himself. At the other window, Charles relapsed into thought. He did not speak again until the car rolled up to the entrance of the showy apartment-hotel where Donald lived. Then, rousing himself abruptly, he said, with a well-done air of negligent sprightliness: —

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"Oh, by the by, Donald — heard anything from our little friend in the four-wheeler, as you call it? I have n't laid eyes on her since that day you and I marched up like little soldiers to give back her books. Funny, that was! — ha, ha!"

Donald's face of a young man about to be married changed perceptibly. He answered, quite stiffly: —

"I fail to see anything funny in it. Miss Flower's perfectly well, I believe."

"Good! — glad to hear it. She needs her health, all the driving about she does. . . . Why, where'd she see you to-day?"

"I did n't say I'd seen her to-day, that I remember. By Jove, I don't get a minute to see anybody or anything, rushed about this way all the time! . . . Well! Obligated for the lift."

"And how do you know she's well, then?"

"Because she told me so over the telephone, if you give a darn! What's this about, anyway?"

"Why, not a thing! Why, my dear fellow! Of *course*, I understand perfectly! You don't suppose I suspect you of being old Tilletts's rival, do you? Not likely — ha, ha! No, I think it's awfully nice of you, old fellow, knowing as I do that you don't admire her particularly. That's what I wanted to say," proceeded Charles, laying his hand affectionately and detainingly on Donald's arm. "Of course you know she does n't have much of a time — attention and all that — oh, I see through you perfectly! It's just Talbott and the Oldmixon girls over again —"

"Oh, she told me about *you*!" said Donald in a blustering manner; and, snatching his arm away, he sprang out upon the sidewalk.

His remark evoked curiosity; but Charles's overweening interest was not in Angela now. And he was thinking intently:

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"He's not engaged to Helen Carson yet, by a long shot. He's not even at the station — that's a mile — on Washington Street. I'd better keep an eye on you, my buck . . ."

Aloud he said: "She did? — nothing good, I fear. Here! — wait a minute! That package for Miss Mary, Donald — I expect you'd better leave it for me to take, after all. I'll find some way to get it around to her —"

"All right —"

"You bring it by as you start for the station, that's the best way. Then we'll drive down together," said Charles, fixing his friend with a compelling gaze. "I've — ah — got some things I want to talk to you about."

"I'll bring it by," said Donald, non-committally, and rushed away.

He went up seven floors, telephoned for the "staff valet," and proceeded to business. There was a period of the wildest activity. At the end of it, the hour being then too late for hope that any expressman would make the train with the trunk, Donald engaged the valet to secure a carriage, take down and check the baggage, get him a ticket and a seat, and be waiting for him with these things at a given point. In such slapdash, inefficient fashion this young man conducted all his personal life.

"And mind you see the baggage on the train," he warned the fellow. "This is an important trip."

He shot down again, dressed to "kill" the house-party, but lugging a large box, and strode out into the fading sunshine. Before the hotel door, to his surprise, stood Charlie Garrott's borrowed car, empty, and before the car stood Charlie Garrott's borrowed driver, greeting him with all his teeth.

"What're *you* waiting here for?" said Donald, staring.

"Goin' to drive you an' Mist' Garrott to the deepo —

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yessuh! Mist' Garrott tole me to wait right here an' bring you round, suh!"

Donald again was rather touched by the thoughtfulness of his friend. Take him all in all, old Charlie was a pretty good fellow. However, he would have ridden down in the hack with the valet, if he had wanted to ride. Of course, he might send the box around by this fellow — but no, if old Charlie was expecting him, that would seem pretty short, particularly as Mrs. Herman's was right on his way.

"I'm much obliged to you — er — Eustace — but I'll walk, I guess. I have n't had any exercise to-day."

"Boss, he say you mout not ketch yo' train if you was to walk."

"Oh, I've got plenty of time for the train — plenty!" said Donald, hastily, and shifted the box to look at his watch again. "I'll leave word for Mr. Garrott myself."

"Suh! Thank you kindly, suh!"

Donald swung off toward Mrs. Herman's, but three blocks distant. Behind him, unobserved, trailed the old lady's limousine, very slow. When he was still a block from his destination, the hurrying young man was all at once struck with an annoying recollection. "Curses!" he groaned. "I forgot my sweater!" That meant that he would have to go back, without doubt: for the sweater was a brand-new one, of brilliant Australian wool, and specially purchased in New York for the winter-sports. Donald, accordingly, felt unable to linger over his good-bye messages to Charles. He said hurriedly to Mrs. Herman, who opened the door for him: "How-do! Please give this box to Mr. Garrott, and tell him I decided to walk. He'll understand." And on that, he sprang away down the steps, two at a time, and started swiftly back to the Bellingham.

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But just as he reached the corner, he was suddenly arrested by the sound of his own name, rolling loudly after him down the street.

"Donald! Hi, there! Stop!"

Donald halting, looked upward and all about him. Presently, through the top branches of an intervening tree, he descried Charles Garrott leaning far out of Mrs. Herman's third-story window. "Well?" called Donald.

"What's the matter? Where're you going?" demanded Charles in a voice that broke easily through the tree. "I said we'd drive down together!"

He was heard continuing in another tone: "*No!* Stop, Eustace! Don't go away — I want you!"

"Much obliged," shouted Donald, "but I'd rather walk."

Charles said something out the window, which Donald failed to catch.

"What say?"

"You come back!" cried Charles, beckoning, while passing pedestrians craned their necks upward. "Wait for me — just a minute — I'm all ready! And I've got to speak to you — about several things! About the package!"

But Donald, objecting to the attention they were attracting, shook his head decisively. "Have n't time now. Forgot something . . . back to my rooms."

"If you have n't time to wait, you certainly have n't time to walk back to your rooms! You're going to miss your train with all this walking!"

That was pointed enough to cause Donald to pause again, and look at his watch for the twentieth time. He found that he still had twenty-five minutes, time enough, of course, but then he might have to hunt for the sweater, and there was the business of the luggage at the station, too.

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Down through the branches boomed the strangely insistent voice of Charles: "Why, by George ! You've only got twenty minutes. Here, take my car there, quick! You can barely make it, driving fast . . ."

And in a lower voice he said: "After him, Eustace! Get him to the station as fast as you can. Don't fail this time."

Donald was hesitating, struck as Charles meant him to be, with the fear that his watch might be slow. He now called, with evidences of ill-humor and disturbance: —

"All right, then! But I can't stop for you."

"Oh, that's all right, old fellow — my matters can wait! I'll look out for the package! Just you catch your train, that's all!"

Continuing to lean out of the Studio window, Charles watched the dullard step into the old lady's tightly closed car, and whirl away — safe at last. As the car shot round the corner, he suddenly laughed aloud: a triumphant laugh, but charged with irritation, too.

Then Charles, aloft, drew head and torso back into the Studio, banged shut the window, and found Mrs. Herman just plumping the large white box of things for Mary down on his writing-table. The spectacle brought forward the other matter instantly. Of course, he had agreed to receive the box purely as a means of keeping an eye on Donald.

"Oh, yes — as to the package, Mrs. Herman, perhaps you would n't mind taking it down as you go, and just leaving it on the hall table? I — ah — shall probably call a messenger to take it — a little later."

"Certainly, Mr. Garrott," said Mrs. Herman, picking up the box again. "And oh, would you mind telling the Judge I'd like to speak to him a minute before he goes out?"

"Certainly, Mrs. Herman."

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The landlady, lingering, said: "He seems in poor spirits, don't you think so, Mr. Garrott? His appetite is not what it was. And he goes out and takes these long walks, alone, day after day, or sits here by himself in the Studio. I don't think it's good for him. I think he broods."

"It's nothing serious, Mrs. Herman. He's annoyed with me, I fear, for giving up some physical culture exercises which he hoped might make a man of me yet. Also, for being such a continuous failure as a writer."

"But it's not your fault, Mr. Garrott! You do the very best you can, I'm sure. The Judge is unreasonable — that's what I say. Oh, I could coax him into a good humor easily enough, but I scarcely ever see him nowadays, except at meal times. I can't very well offer to go with him on his walks, can I? — but I'm sure the solitude is bad for him."

"Ah, you should get yourself a little Fordette, Mrs. Herman."

"And what is a little Fordette, Mr. Garrott?"

"Oh — simply a sort of wheeled device for going with people on their walks. I'm explaining it in a story. But," said Charles, "I won't fail to give the Judge your message."

Left alone, the young man stood for a space in the middle of the floor, gazing intently at nothing. Then he seated himself at his table and produced manuscript from the drawer. Then he put the manuscript back in the drawer, and stared at nothing again. Finally, he rose, opened the bedroom door quietly, and said: —

"Judge, I find I have to go out for a little while."

Judge Blenso, in the bedroom, received the friendly information, and then his message from Mrs. Herman, with only a cold "Very well!" He stood at a long board, balanced on two distant chair-backs, listlessly pressing the trousers he

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did n't have on; his instrument being a patent electric-flatiron, which consumed quantities of current, which indeed fairly gave the measure of his landlady's adoration. Catch Mrs. Herman letting Two-Book McGee use so much as an electric curling-iron in the Second Hall Back!

"And Judge," added Charles, conciliatingly, "please don't bother to take that manuscript to the express-office — I mean 'Bandwomen' — unless you really want the walk."

"Very well! I hear you! Good gad, very well!" said the Judge.

Charles shut the door, regretfully. It had been like this between them for some weeks now. Even his generosity in quietly yielding the name of his own only novel produced no softening effect on his secretary's cold bored disapprobation.

He put on hat and overcoat, descended two flights, picked up the box of things for Mary, and went out upon his errand. He walked slowly, down Mason Street to Olive, and at Olive turned south.

For the second time, Donald had contrived to force his hand in regard to Mary: he was conscious of resenting that. Still — of course he had never meant to let the old friendship end in estrangement, and doubtless the casual pretext of the box was better than the formal "call" next week he had had in mind. To appear as Mary's cheerer-up now was, indeed, considerably beyond him. Nevertheless, he was well aware that what Donald had told him in this connection had made an instant difference in his feeling, made him readier to be friends again. If only she had felt and realized all this in the beginning, if only she had showed him so that day over the telephone. . . .

Still, feeling was n't enough, unfortunately. There was this whole business about Donald, for instance. In one way he

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could think of that almost pleurably. Mary seemed to suppose that if she but arranged a house-party and gave Donald a sound talking to in advance, the whole thing was settled, down to the orange-blossoms. It required him to revise her crude plannings, put in the omitted *finesse*, and deliver Donald safely at the station. But Charles, pacing gravely toward the unpremeditated meeting, large box under his arm, found his thought of the episode continually seeking deeper levels. If, two weeks from now, Donald was still not engaged to Helen, whose was to be the responsibility of pushing him on? Not Mary's, evidently. Was not this youth, in fact, but one more of those countless intimate obligations which strong women must "hack away," when resolved to lead their own lives? Donald was the apple of Mary's eye. Normally speaking, she was ready to do anything for him. But it seemed that even Donald, if he crossed the trail of the Career, would have to look to himself.

Or, more probably, he, Charles, would have to look out for him.

At the corner of Washington Street, pausing, the meditative young man consulted his watch; he shifted the box for the purpose just as Donald had done a few minutes earlier. It was quarter past five, exactly. Donald would be at the station now, without doubt, safe on the train. Well, here was one thing he had done for Mary, at any rate, as he should not fail to indicate to her. And thus, insensibly, his thought slipped into the pleasurable vein again, the superior, masterful vein, and his mind composed the light ironic sentences with which he should make known to Mary her remissness and his own subtle services.

Stepping down from the curb in this brown study, he all but walked into a motor-car whirring by: a car that was steal-

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ing the wrong side of the street, and cutting close to the sidewalk at that. Charles stopped and stepped back, just in time. And then, all in the same breath, his ears, his eyes, and his nostrils telegraphed his brain what car, and whose, this was. It was the Fordette, none other, going at an unprecedented speed, now curving back dangerously to the side where it belonged. On a cloud of the dark smoke it sometimes emitted, Angela's girlish laugh came floating back to him distinctly. But Charles's gaze was fixed on the figure of the man who sat at Angela's side and held the Fordette wheel; and his eyes all but started from his head as he perceived that it was Donald. . . .

Yes, it was poor Donald fast in the Home-Making conveyance: Donald, snatched, she alone knew how, from his wedding-coach.

XX

THE famous Secretary sat at her desk in the well-kept sitting-room. She sat in the midst of documents and letters; large white sheets of her Education League writing-paper lay before her, the topmost sheet nearly filled with her neat chirography. Oblivious to small happenings in the world without, the Secretary was deep in her distinguished correspondence. But her desk, as it happened, stood in the window, and the Secretary, after all, was not so immersed in her affairs but that she looked out into the Park now and then, sometimes for whole minutes together. She looked, too, into the quiet street before the house. And so it was that her eyes, in time, fell upon the familiar figure of Charles Garrott; striding all at once into her range, turning swiftly in at her door, vanishing again into her vestibule, scarcely five feet from where she sat.

Though thus aware that she was about to have a caller, Mary did not at once spring up to go and welcome him. She sat, entirely motionless, her permanently questioning gaze fixed on the spot where the caller had passed from view. The ringing of the bell scarcely seemed to penetrate her consciousness. But then, in a moment, she dropped her pen quickly, and rose. Standing, she locked her two hands together before her, very tight, released them again, passed out into the hall, and opened her front door.

"Good-afternoon! This is an unexpected pleasure," said she, in her natural voice, or very near it. "Come in! — or can you?"

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Her visitor looked full at her from the vestibule, unsmiling.

"Oh, certainly — if you're not too busy! It's what I am here for. How do you do to-day?"

"That's nice! You don't often honor us, and — I feared you had merely stopped to leave that package."

"Ah, yes! — the package! Some things Donald got for you — I suppose you know? He asked me —"

"Oh! I'm afraid that was very much of an imposition — and I was really in no hurry for them at all."

She thanked him, relieved him of the pretextual box, laid it on the hall table, and, with inevitable but extreme infelicity, continued: —

"You saw Donald to-day, then?"

A small silence preceded his controlled reply "Oh, yes! — I saw him."

"I've just packed him off to a house-party at the Kingsleys' — to make love to Helen Carson. But perhaps he told you?"

In the large mirror overhanging the table, the eyes of the once excellent friends briefly encountered. She was puzzled by the quality of his grave gaze.

"He did mention a house-party, I believe. But —"

Turning away toward the sitting-room, Mary filled the pause with a little laugh: "But you think he won't make love to Helen, perhaps?"

The grave young man, following her, did not burst forth, even then. His restraint seemed curious, even to himself. Crossing Washington Street just now, he had been full enough of plain speech, for this young woman's good. "I've had quite enough of this!" he would say to her. "I can't and won't give up my afternoons, my life, to playing nurse to Donald. If you are satisfied to have him marry Miss Angela, well and good. If not —" and then a last warning, far sharper, far

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more direct, than the other. But then as he waited upon her steps, and then as he looked at her in the door, the springs of this trivial anger had seemed mysteriously to subside and dry up. No doubt the Career-Maker's own look had something to do with that. Her face in the afternoon light was seen to be thin and tired; he thought he detected faint circles under her eyes, a slightly pinched look about her nostrils. But beyond all that, beyond any question of "sympathy," or cheering-up, it seemed that the affair itself had suddenly shrunk in importance. Donald's folly, Angela's little foibles, seemed to matter less to Charles as he found himself looking again at the departing heroine of his write-ups.

So he discharged his bolt with restrained formality: "It is n't that. I was only wondering whether or not you had packed him off, as yet."

"Oh! — but have n't I? . . . I don't understand."

"I happened to see him a minute ago, driving on Washington Street with your cousin — Miss Angela."

It was clear that the topic had lost no interest for Mary, at any rate. She stopped short in the middle of the floor, utterly taken aback.

"*Donald!* — as you came here?"

And, instantly recovering from mere astonishment, her capable gaze flew to the little watch on her wrist.

Charles reassured her, as dryly as possible: "However, they were headed toward the station, and going as fast as they could. I think he will make his train."

"But — it's not possible, I'm afraid! His train goes at five twenty-two — it's just that now! . . . Ah, how *could* he!"

Producing his own valued chronometer, the young man compared it with the educator's small trinket.

"I believe you're a little fast, are n't you? I'm five-eighteen.

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And it was just quarter past when I saw them, for I looked to see. That gave him seven minutes —"

"Yes — well! — but Angela's little car is so slow —"

"Oh! — it can go fast enough for practical purposes — I've observed. Besides, Donald may have telephoned and found that the train was late."

"Yes — that's true."

Mary Wing looked toward the window, characteristically composed again, but evidently concerned enough.

"Well, I hope so. It would be too stupid of him to miss it, after all . . . I can't think how he happened to be with Angela — at the last minute this way."

"How, indeed? But sit down, do, and I'll tell you why it seems particularly — mystifying to me. I hope," the formal caller added, with a glance toward the busy-looking desk, "I'm not interrupting?"

The General Secretary said no, with some brevity.

In sentences less copious and biting than he had sketched out on the corner, Charles recited the history of his futile afternoon. He could not, indeed, believe it possible that Donald, having donned the solemn bridegroom look for Helen Carson, would deliberately throw it off again for the sake of a short drive in the Fordette: which, to say the least of it, could be had at any time at his desire. Nor was Donald really a born fool, who would miss a train through sheer childish carelessness. The inference was that, encountering Angela, accidentally (more or less), just after his second start, the youth had calculated that he still had time to spare; and so had consented to exchange the speedy limousine for the Fordette: quite probably in no spirit more serious than that of a venturesome lark. Charles's remarks, at least, took these generous grounds, reassuring as to the moment. And still a tinge of

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exasperation crept into his account of his wasted labors. And still something in him seemed to require that he should bring these small responsibilities home where they belonged, for once: leaving them on her doorstep, as it were, for her to jump over when she went away.

But his story, inevitably, was one of ungallant efforts to evade impending pursuit. And when, to point up his lesson, he guardedly suggested a connection between the natural ambitions of Miss Angela, and the two complete transplantations of her family, Mary Wing seemed to gather more of his purely private thought than he had intended. One of her intent interrogative stares brought him to an unintended pause. And she commented quietly, but rebukingly, he considered: —

“You seem to have changed your opinion of Angela since last week.”

There, of course, he hardly cared to justify himself. He could not well explain what Angela's resemblance to her mother had signified to him, and why he considered poor Dr. Flower the most magnificent romanticist in the world.

“I merely suggest,” he said, with stiffening dignity, “that she does seem to be much interested in Donald — and he in her — now. I happen to know that he called on her twice the day he left for New York, and talked with her over the telephone this morning. But you mistake me, if you think I mean to criticize your cousin — personally. I hope I understand better than that how — all this — is as logical and mathematical as a natural law. How far in the other direction the education of women ought to take them . . . that, of course, is not for me to guess. . . . My point is only that these — these perfectly logical ambitions — are strong enough to be taken seriously by those who mean to oppose them.”

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"Do you doubt that I take this seriously?"

"I have doubted it, I must admit. . . . Suppose this house-party comes to nothing, what do you mean to do?"

The former heroine of the write-ups did not answer him at once. She sat in a straight chair, half-sidewise, a considerable distance away; her arm was laid along the chair-back, her cheek sunk upon her hand. Something in the pose made the caller think of Donald's exaggerated statement, that he had never seen Mary so blue in his life.

When she spoke, it was not again to suggest, offhand, that he should save Donald by stepping in.

"You are right, of course," she said with a certain dignity herself. "I have n't been thinking of it as seriously as I should — evidently. Now — if this does n't come to anything — I'll need some time to plan about it."

"It's going to be rather troublesome, I'm afraid. And you — I —"

"I'll make it my chief interest, you may be sure."

Then the stiff caller, examining his shirt-cuff as if he had never seen such an object before, released his logical comment:

"But I'm afraid you have n't left yourself a great deal of time, have you? Two weeks may prove rather a small allowance — for a difficult matter like this."

"Oh, I — hope there will be time enough. Meantime, I —"

"I had n't realized you were going so soon, you see. That will add to the difficulties, I'm afraid. Donald says you expect to leave on the 20th."

He meant his rejoinders to be unanswerable, and she seemed to find them so. Glancing up from his cuff in the silence, Charles found his famous friend's eyes fixed upon him in a strange gaze, which her lids and lashes veiled at once. Had that look struck him from any other eyes in the world, he

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would have labeled it reproachful, without the smallest hesitation. But Mary was never reproachful: she scarcely thought enough of him for that; and, besides, the shoe was on the other foot, as she should know very well.

"I did say something of the sort last week, I believe — though no day was really settled on. But it was very nice of you," she went on naturally enough, but with too evident a wish to shift the conversation, "to take so much trouble about it to-day. I do appreciate all your interest in it — and I do believe it's going to turn out right, too. Donald certainly left me with that feeling, this afternoon. So don't let's bother about it any more now," said Mary. "I'd much rather hear — some more about your writing. I hope you've gotten the book well started now?"

But Charles, unique among the writers of the world, did not want to talk about himself to-day. No, he had found the topic for him now.

"No! — I have n't, I'm sorry to say. Your arrangements are all made, are n't they? Judge Blenso tells me you're going to live with Sophy Stein, who used to run the Pure Food laboratories here?"

Again her brief look seemed to thrust upon him like a hand, and again her reply glanced off: —

"Yes — I was planning to live with her. You knew her, did n't you, when —"

"I was going to say — if everything is arranged, perhaps you would n't need to start so early. . . . Of course, the idea of your friends here would be that you should wait till the last day."

As she neither approved nor rejected this amiable suggestion, Charles said: "How does that idea appeal to you?"

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To his surprise, instead of answering his question, Mary rose abruptly and went over to her desk. He then assumed that she wished to show him some letter bearing on her arrangements for her new life. But it seemed that her movement had no such object. She merely stood there a moment, fingering her papers in an irresolute sort of way; and then, without a word, she moved a little farther, and stood, looking out of the window.

He said, at once with bewilderment and with increasing constraint: "Or possibly you don't wish me to know when you are going?"

Then Mary Wing turned in the dying light, and said, not dramatically at all, but in her quietest everyday voice: —

"No, I don't mind your knowing. I'm not going."

And still the authority on women did not understand.

"Not going — when?"

"I've decided not to accept the appointment."

And, sitting down, suddenly and purposelessly at her desk, the young woman of the Career added in a rather let-down voice: "I have n't told anybody at all yet. I just decided — last night."

Then came silence into the twilight sitting-room, surely a silence like none here before it. In the Wings' best chair, the caller sat still as a marble man, while the little noises from the street grew loud and louder. And then, quite abruptly and mechanically, he began to rise, exactly as if an unseen spirit were lifting him bodily by the hair. And he could feel all the blood drawing out of his face.

"Not going to accept the appointment," he echoed suddenly, in a queer voice.

And then, as if so reminded that his tongue possessed this accomplishment, he all at once burst out: "Why — but —

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why! You *have* accepted it! It was settled! — long ago! *Not going!* — what do you mean? Why, what's happened?"

The young woman seated so inappropriately at the desk, gazing so meaninglessly into pigeon-holes, made no reply. And now Charles Garrott was walking toward her, walking as the entranced walk, fascinated, staring with fixed eyes that had forgotten how to wink.

"What're you talking about? I don't know what you mean! Why, what's happened — what's gone wrong?"

Mary Wing grew restless under his questionings; she spoke with obvious effort: "Nothing's happened — nothing's gone wrong. I say, I simply decided that I would n't — take the position, after all. I decided I would refuse it. So I was writing to Dr. Ames — to explain . . . That's all I can say."

But the man standing over her looked more spellbound than ever.

"Explain!—explain what? . . . Why — you can't put me off like this — can you?" said he, all his stiffness so shattered by her thunderbolt, all his struggle but for some effect of poise. "You *must* know — I'm tremendously interested. And — I'm obliged to feel that something pretty serious has happened to make you —"

"No! — nothing has happened at all, I've said. I assure you — nothing."

"But . . . You can't imagine how absolutely in the dark . . . Do you mean you've found something else you'd rather do — here?"

"I suppose that's one way of putting it — yes. . . . Why, I simply say that when the time came — I was n't able to do it, that's all. . . . No, I did n't want to do it — that must have been it. Of course, people always do what they really want most."

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"You did n't want to do what? . . . You know, that's just what I don't quite understand."

"But I've just told you," she protested; and there stopped short.

She had overcome the brief weakness which had seemed to seize her when, for the first time, she heard her intention declared aloud, the spoken word, it may be, imparting to it the last irrevocable stroke. She, the competent, would not be incompetent with her own great affair. And now, as if she reluctantly acknowledged some right he had to understand, she seemed to force herself to speak again, in a voice from which her self-control had pressed all tone.

"I mean that, when the time came, I could n't pick up and go away — for good — no matter what was at the other end. I mean I was n't willing to. I'd rather not."

She took a breath; and then tone came into her sentences, but it was only a sort of light hardness.

"I suppose it all came down to this — that I was n't willing to leave mother — in the way I should have to leave her. I did n't want to. It was not possible . . . And I'm afraid that's all I can say."

"But of course I understand you now," said the young man instantly, in the strangest mild voice.

"Then, if you will — please me — let's say no more about it."

To that stanch speech he made no reply: perhaps he did not hear it. Winter dusk had crept quickly into the pretty sitting-room. The tall figure motionless by the little desk grew perceptibly dimmer.

That understanding Charles spoke of had come upon him by successive shocks, each violent in its way. His had been the mere mad sense of a world too suddenly swung upside down,

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of the individual himself left standing brilliantly on his head. That had been just at first; and then perception had slid into him like a lance, and his feet had struck the solid ground with a staggering jolt. It was as if, at a word, all the supporting fabrications of his mind had turned to thin air, and out he fell headlong, at last, upon the real and the true. And this real and this true was Mary Wing, nothing else, standing where she had always stood; Mary, his best old friend, whom he had given his back to, belabored with harsh words, while she struggled at the crossroads of her life — to this. Now contrition, now humbleness had shaken the young authority, a poignant conviction of his failure, in understanding and in friendship. And then she spoke again, making it all quite perfect with simple words that he himself, in a dream, might have shaped and put into her mouth. *I was n't willing to leave mother.* And after that, it seemed that nothing about himself could possibly matter in the least.

"You know," he said, quite naturally, out of the small silence, "I think it's beautiful that a girl like you can feel this way — a girl with your abilities — your usefulness and splendid success — and now this magnificent oppor —"

"Don't! — please don't! I had n't meant to speak of it at all. I — we won't discuss it, please."

She spoke hastily, pushing back the papers she had been pretending to arrange, starting to rise. But that word or that movement seemed to galvanize the still Charles into the suddenest life.

"*Discuss it!*" he cried, in a new voice. "Why, we're going to have the greatest discussion you ever heard!"

For perhaps the strangest part of this destructive upheaval was that it seemed to leave every idea he had ever had about this Career completely reversed. One word from Mary Wing

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about not leaving her mother, and nothing seemed to matter but that she, in her fine recklessness, should not be allowed to sacrifice her triumph and her life.

"No! — please! It's settled now. And it only makes —"

But her friend, the authority, had flung himself into the chair beside her, like an excited boy, and he seized her wrist on the desk-leaf in an arresting grip.

"No, it is n't settled till it's settled right! — don't you know that? Is this your letter to Ames here? Let me tear it up for you now! Refuse the appointment! Why, Miss *Mary*! You can't think of such a thing! You! — a worker with a mission — and this your great call! — your big opportunity — your *duty*! Yes, your —"

She interrupted his flowing modernisms to say, quite patiently: "You're hurting my wrist."

"Yes, and I'm going on hurting it till I see that letter torn up! Now, Miss *Mary*! — listen to me — for once — I beg! You won't suppose I don't understand — now — what made you sit down to do this, and I — I need n't say I admire you immensely for feeling so. But — don't you see — if life's hard, it's not your doing, and if it's hardest on mothers, you can't change the conditions by a hair's-breadth, no matter what you do. . . . Why, if you were going to marry Donald, and go off to Wyoming, the break here would be just as bad, but you'd never think it was n't right — you'd know that these were the terms and conditions of life. Oh, you know all that as well as I! You know the duty is n't from children to parents — no, I swear, it's from parents to children, every time. And your mother'll be the first to say so — you know that, too! You know, when you tell her you're thinking of doing this, she'll go down on her knees to beg you to take your youth — and your life — and be free —"

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He was deflected by one of Mary's normal level gazes, turned upon him. She said steadily: —

"How long have you been feeling this way?"

"Ten years! And then — for about five minutes."

"I had understood somehow — I don't know how exactly — that you always thought I should stay here."

The young man felt a flush spreading upward toward his hair, but would not lower his eyes.

"Perhaps I did have some such feeling — in a sort of — personal, illogical way. But if it's the last word I ever speak — you've destroyed the last shred of it."

He rose abruptly, without intention. Nothing in the world was clearer to him than that he and his reactions mattered little to her now; yet the desire mounted in him to explain how it was never the thing itself, but always the feeling about it, that had seemed so important to him. However, the school-teacher, with a little definitive gesture of the arm he had released, spoke first: —

"Well, never mind! Don't argue with me, please. It's as over and done with as something last year —"

But Charles, upon his unimagined task of persuading Mary to act as the Egoettes act, cried out: "No! — no! Argue! Why, d' you think I'll stand by and hold my tongue, while you sacrifice the great chance of your life, your particular dream — for a mere notion of *duty*! I say, and I've always said, that freedom — and the right to do your work — belong to you, if to anybody in the world! You've —"

"Do you really suppose I've lain awake all these nights without learning what my own mind is?"

Having stopped him effectually with this dry thrust, she went on in another manner, not controversial at all, rather like one speaking to herself.

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"And as for my freedom — that's not involved at all. . . . I was thinking just now that maybe this is just what freedom — responsible freedom — really is — means. It's having the ability and the desire and the fair chance to do a thing — *and then not do it.*"

And then Charles Garrott knew, quite suddenly and finally, that this, indeed, was no talk in a book, but the realest thing in the world; that this incredible had really happened: that Mary Wing, the "hard" Career-Maker, was tossing her Career away. . . .

He stood quite silenced, while she spoke her last decisive word.

"So you see you have a wrong idea of — what I'm doing, altogether. I appreciate your — being so interested — I value it, you know that," said Mary Wing in a controlled voice, hard even. "But I can't leave you thinking that I'm simply sacrificing myself — to my mother, for instance. It is n't that way at all. Of course, I'm no more to mother than mother is to me. It's not a sacrifice. . . . Or, rather — I'm in the position that people are always in — more or less. Either way, I've got to sacrifice — and this is the way I choose. But it's getting very dark. I must light the lamps."

She rose as she spoke, and having risen, bent again, to snap on, superfluously, her little desk-light. And as she so stood and bent, the large hand of Charles Garrott reached out suddenly, and began to pat her shoulder.

She seemed but a slip of a girl, no more, that he, Charles, could have tossed upon his shoulder, and so walked out upon a journey. But here, in a wink, she had shot up so tall upon his horizon that he himself, beside her, seemed to possess no significance at all. She might be right, she might be wrong: but, to him, the authority, this crashing negation of the Ego

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was the flung banner of a splendid trustworthiness, a fitness to lead her own life, indeed, such as should not be questioned henceforward. Never had this woman's independence of him spoken out to him with so clarion a voice as now. And still, over and through her unemotional firmness, the sense of what a giving-up was here swelled in him almost overwhelmingly. It was the brilliant prize of ten years' checkered struggle that his old friend to-day so stoically threw away. Here was a refusal which would touch every corner of her life to its farthest reaches. . . .

So Charles Garrott's warring sensations, his humility and his pride in her, had instinctively expressed themselves in the awkward mute gesture of his sympathies.

By chance, it was Mary's more distant shoulder that his novel impulse had prompted him to pat and go on patting: so, from the accident of their positions, an eye-witness might have been with difficulty convinced that this man's arm was not actually about the slim figure of his friend. But a jury, without doubt, would have accepted the friend's attitude, her entire indifference to what was going on, as fair proof that this was purely a modern proceeding, and no caress. To ask why he did this clearly did not enter Mary's head. Had she been a man, indeed, or he her father, she could hardly have seemed more unaffected by Charles Garrott's unexampled ministrations.

With what speech he meant to accompany and justify his pattings, Charles had not stopped to think. He had, in fact, himself just become conscious of them, when Mary, straightening up, said suddenly in her normal voice: —

“There's the telephone ringing. Excuse me a minute.”

She gave him a brief look in passing, which may have been intended as some sort of courteous acknowledgment of the

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pattings after all. And then she disappeared into the hall, putting an end to talk: inopportunistically he felt; leaving him with a vague sense of inartistic incompleteness. . . .

The young man stood still in the silent sitting-room, in a duskiest just punctuated by the small green glow of the desk-lamp.

One of those many minds of his, which are at once a writer's genius and his curse, — that completely detached, cool over-mind which never sleeps, never ceases to scrutinize and appraise, — was quite conscious that Mary had held him off with a hand firmer than his own. There was a tremendous lot that he really needed to say, it seemed, in sheer admiration, sheer feeling; and, the truth was, she did n't wish to have him say it. No; her strength, though so far finer and more sensitive than the strength of the Egoette, was, indeed, not "soft." She would not sentimentalize even her own suicidal renouncing. As for weeping — he himself had seemed rather nearer tears than his iron-hearted friend. . . .

But the intense thought of the central mind, of the net Charles, had never wavered from its great stark fact, that Mary Wing was going to stay at home — and be a school-teacher. . . . And why had he, who thought himself as observant as another authority, been staggered so by the revelation? Had not he himself divined just this subtler quality in her long ago, when he found and named her as the best type of modern woman? . . . But no, even in "Bondwomen," he had had reservations, it seemed; open doubts in the write-ups.

And now, Charles the author, in his turn, abruptly collided with a strange discovery. He stood rigid, startled. . . . This strength and this surrender, this power to act, this power to feel, this freedom fine enough to accept the responsibilities of

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freedom, and to have no part with that hollow Self-Assertion which traded round the world in freedom's name: what was all this but the rounded half of that true Line which, in the Studio, had so long eluded him? What had he wished to say about freedom so much as just this? And why need he search in his fancy now for his wholly Admirable Heroine? . . .

Mary Wing appeared suddenly in the door. Unmoving, the young man stood and gazed at her; and so vivid had his imaginings become that his stare was touched with no greeting, no recognition even. And then, even in the dusk, he seemed to see that she, his Heroine in the flesh, brought back a face more troubled than she had taken out, eyes colored with a fresh anxiety.

He spoke rather confusedly: "What was it? Is anything the matter?"

"Dr. Flower's very ill," she answered hurriedly. "He's had a stroke, or something. I'm afraid it's very serious. I must go there at once."

All the small fret of the earlier afternoon, every thought and association with which he had walked into this room just now had receded so fast and far that re-connection, all in a moment, was not easy. Charles, staring, seemed to say: "And who, if you please, is Dr. Flower?" And then his mind replied with a flashing picture of Angela's father, as he had last seen him, sitting forlorn among his cigar-stubs: and at once he touched reality again.

"Ah! I'm sorry!" said he; and then: "You must let me go with you."

"Well — thank you — if you like."

And Mary, already moving away toward the bedrooms, added then, in a colorless sort of way: —

"Who do you suppose telephoned me from there?"

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"Who telephoned? — I don't know —"

She paused, half turned, looked back at him, hesitated, and then spoke but a single word: —

"Donald."

Brief though the reply was, it was sufficient to plant Charles Garrott's feet permanently upon the earth.

After an interval, with movements purely mechanical, he sought for his watch. It was quarter past six. And he understood everything then.

XXI

CHARLES thought that he understood everything now. In so far as he built a theory on the cold Argument from Design, he understood, of course, nothing whatever. The truth was that Angela had had other things than Mr. Manford to think of to-day. That she had gone out in her Fordette at all was only by the merest chance.

Trouble had come into the little house of the Flowers. As early as one o'clock, Dr. Flower had preëmpted the family attention. Coming in from the Medical School half an hour before his regular time, he had shut himself in his office, without explanation; and there he sat all afternoon, declining dinner with a shake of his head, and otherwise strangely uncommunicative and withdrawn. Reminded that this was Friday, which meant another lecture at half-past two, he only said in his puzzling way: "Quite so. I have no stomach for the small talk to-day." Mrs. Flower, stealing now and again to the dark office, doing her duty as wife and mother, returned each time more concerned by her husband's remoteness, less reassured by his grave statements that he was not sick, in stomach or elsewhere. The two women spent a long and uneasy afternoon. And at the critical moment of it — the moment when, a mile to the west, Charles Garrott leaned out of his third-story window — Angela sat anxious in her mother's bed-room, discussing whether or not they should take the responsibility of calling in Dr. Blakie, on the next block.

But Angela did not think that her father was ill, exactly: it was more as if his increasing queerness had reached a sort of

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climax. And now, by chance, — or was it destiny, in this its favorite mask? — he quite suddenly got over his mysterious attack; and the deepening worry lifted from her young shoulders. Of his own accord, her father emerged from the office and his unusual aloofness together, and came walking upstairs to the bedroom, speaking with his own voice — speaking, indeed, more freely than was his wont. He said at once that his headache was better now: this being his first reference to his head at all. As if struck by his daughter's troubled expression as he entered, he smiled at her and patted her cheek in the kindest way; and then, becoming thoughtful, unexpectedly produced a two-dollar bill from his trousers pocket, and handed it to her with some characteristically strange words about her dowry, words which afterwards she could never quite remember. There followed some commonplace family talk, entirely reassuring.

And it was only then, in the certainty that everything was all right again, that Angela allowed herself to recall her own affairs once more. It was only then, with the thought that her recovered father very likely wished to talk alone with her mother, that she left the bedroom and her two parents together. At the door, she mentioned that probably she would go out and get a little air, before it was time for supper.

The old clock in the dining-room downstairs had then just struck five. However, very little more time could have elapsed before the relieved young girl, hatted and coated, issued hurrying from the kitchen door, toward the garage that had once been a shed. Yet another minute, and she was rolling from the alley-mouth.

To snatch Mr. Manford from his wedding-coach: was this the calculation that sent Angela forth in the fair eve of the disquieting day? Perhaps such a raid and capture would not

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have seemed quite a crime to her, or to any woman that ever lived. But nothing, of course, was further from her thoughts. That she might conceivably meet Mr. Manford while she took the air, and even exchange a few words with him, Angela did, indeed, think, and hope. But this mild maidenly fancy was as innocent as it was rightfully hers. Good reason she had to know that a little chat in passing, if so be it should come about, would be no less acceptable to Mr. Manford than to herself. Had he not told her by telephone this morning that if he could find so much as a minute in this rushing day, he would spend it in calling on her?

On the eleventh floor of the Bellingham, Donald stood hastily rolling his new sweater into a brown-paper parcel. Now into Washington Street, the little Fordette came curving and snorting toward him: toward him, no doubt, in a spiritual, as well as a geographical sense. And still the full depth of the young girl's design was simply this: that her new principal friend, going off for a gay week-end among maidens more blest by opportunity than she, might go with a last pleasant thought of her.

For Mr. Manford was Angela's principal friend now; there was no longer the smallest doubt of that. On that day of culminating results last week, when the unusual line of vehicles had stood before her door, the stalwart engineer had definitely moved up to first place in her thoughts. Not only had Mr. Manford called for an hour and three-quarters that day, while Dan Jenney cooled his heels in the office, and then went off for a walk alone: but then also he had first shown, by unmistakable signs, that he was truly interested in her. Moreover, in the very same moments, by a strange and rather exciting coincidence, she found herself becoming almost certain that she was truly interested in Mr. Manford. She must have

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been pretty certain, even then, for it was that night after supper, just before she started off to the theater with Mr. Tilletts, that she had told Dan Jenney in the parlor, sadly but firmly, that it could never be, and given him back his ring.

And since then, the shy girlish surmise had been further fed. One pleasant happening continued to lead to another. When she had asked Mr. Manford, half-jokingly, to send her some picture post-cards from New York, for her collection, it was — again — purely from the instinctive wish to know that she remained in her new admirer's thought, even when he was far away. But he had sent her not only stacks of the loveliest post-cards, showing the Flatiron Building, the Statue of Liberty, and other well-known sights, but also the most beautiful book, called "Queens" — a book of gorgeous pictures of American girls, all in color, by one of the most famous artists in Chicago. Of course, common politeness demanded that she should thank him — for "Queens," if not for the post-cards — just as soon as he got back. And the resultant talk, quarter of an hour over the telephone, had been just as satisfying as possible. . . .

Thus it was nothing less than a complete realignment of the coterie that had taken place, this week. For if Mr. Manford had advanced rapidly in the young girl's thought, even more rapidly, of course, had her old principal friend dropped backward out of it. After the unattractive way he had showed his pique that day, Angela had thought about Mr. Garrott, indeed, only long enough to take a final position about him. That position came simply to this, that if he was the sort of person who expected to take liberties with you all the time, then he was not the sort that she, Angela, cared to have anything to do with. She recalled now her early premonition, that Mr. Garrott was a man of low ideals. And she was glad to

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remember how she had put him in his place, the night he had showed his real nature, and positively refused to compromise her standards, simply to keep him on, as so many girls would have done.

Now, in the tail of the complicated day, Angela thought only, and with right, of her engineer. Rapidly up the Street of the Rich she drove, and alert she kept her eyes. But, in truth, the hope in her heart had been but a slim one; and now, with each passing block, she felt it growing slimmer. When she got as far as the Green Park, and saw the time by the church-clock there, it dwindled away blankly to nothing: the worry about her father had kept her in till too late, just as she had thought all along. In short, her mind's eye was picturing Mr. Manford already seated in his train, when he suddenly made her start and jump by appearing at her elbow.

The meeting was his doing altogether. The maid scanned the sidewalks as she proceeded; the man in a closed conveyance came skimming down the middle of the highway. Nothing on earth could have been easier than for him to skim on by her unseen, and nobody a whit the wiser. On the contrary, he must have given the order to stop with instantaneous alacrity. The very first Angela knew of Mr. Manford's nearness at all was the sight of his head sticking out the door of a great car, just ahead of her.

The door was open; the car was coming to a standstill; Mr. Manford was signaling. Nimbly, with an inner leap of happiness, the girl complied with his obvious wishes.

The two self-propelling vehicles, the big one and the little, stood side by side in the middle of Washington Street, while passing chauffeurs detoured around them with looks that cursed as they went. Between the vehicles, on the asphaltum, stood Mr. Manford, dark head bared, speaking sweet, hasty

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parting words: explaining what a terrible rush he had been in since eight o'clock this morning, saying (and looking) how sorry he was not to have been able to call. Eager manly words and self-conscious manner, he was all that a girl could have wished. But then he stopped himself, quite abruptly, as if he had recollected something, and put out his hand with the solemnest look. "*Good-bye!*" he said, and seemed to sigh, as if he never expected to see her again.

But Angela did not take Mr. Manford's hand. Possibly these two minutes should have filled the round of her expectancy; possibly not. Now there rose in her a graceful thought which the sight of her admirer in a conveyance of his own had momentarily rolled flat.

Lifting her soft eyes to his, she said: "I wish — is there time for me to drive you to the station? Or had you rather . . . ?"

"By Jove!" said he, staring. "*That is an idea!*"

The two normal young people gazed at each other through five seconds of intense silence. When the man's gaze broke, it was only to fling it upon the watch he had hurriedly jerked out. And that movement seemed to settle everything. One glance was enough to satisfy the young bridegroom that there *was* time. He so announced, and proceeded accordingly.

Thus, for the second time in fifteen minutes, Eustace and the Big Six were sent empty about their business. And Donald, dressed to "kill" the Carson house-party, sprang to the wheel of Angela's Fordette.

"I'll hop her along," cried he, laughing with the excitement of the thing, as he made the turnabout, "till she won't believe it's *her!*"

And so he did, as old Charlie Garrott, passed unnoticed on the next corner, could have testified, and did. Ten full blocks Donald proceeded toward his train at a wholly honor-

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able, indeed dangerous, celerity. And then his single-mindedness began imperceptibly to yield.

It was, indeed, touch-and-go with Mary Wing's male cousin, here at the turning-point of his life. Had he not forgotten his sweater — well, who knows? Now as the station grew steadily nearer, now as the pretty and familiar voice spoke at his side, one thing was leading to another, and his nervous fidgeting increased.

It occurred to Donald, not for the first time, that he was being rushed about a great deal here lately, with never a minute he could call his own. Managed around all the time — that was about the size of it, here lately: railroaded along into things, with no chance at all to stop and think quietly what he wanted to do. . . . Then, in a quiet stretch before the turn at Ninth Street, he looked down at the beguiling soft creature beside him, whom he had come to know so easily, so quickly, and so well. His gaze rested upon the rounded girlish bosom, rising and falling with tender young life, at the neck fair as a lily where the V of the thin white waist liberally revealed it, at the big eyes of a woman looking back at him so dark and sweet. And he was surprised at the sensations the look of these eyes now had power to draw up out of him. How? Why? Had absence made the heart mysteriously fonder? Or was it something in the intimacy of this swift adventure together — her sharing his dash for the train like some one who belonged to him? . . .

"I wish I did n't have to run off this way," he muttered, restively, after a long silence.

"I'll miss you," said she, and the dark eyes fell.

He found the simple reply oddly stirring, arresting, and significant. He was going to be away only three days, and she, this dear, different fellow-being whose gentle weakness

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already seemed to depend on him, was going to miss him. At some risk, for they now bounced through the traffic of Center Street, he looked down at her again. And once again the sum of all Donald's observations was this, that Angela was a Woman. . . .

No jawing here about the isms of the day, Browning — Tosti — no, Tolstoy — those chaps; no arguing back at you over things a man, of course, knows most about. No; this girl was all Woman. . . .

"I suppose," said she, all at once, "there is n't a train just a little later you could take?"

By singular chance, the thought of the later train had that second knocked at Donald's own mind. Marveling at the coincidence, he hesitated, and answered weakly: —

"Well, there's sort of a train at 7.50 — a local. But — this is the train they're expecting me by."

She made no reply. Glancing down, he got no answering glance: she was looking, large-eyed and wistful, into empty space. Her silence, that look, seemed in some subtle way to lay hold on whatever was best in the young man, compellingly. Beyond his understanding, they seemed to envelop Donald with a sudden profound pressure, immensely detaining.

Now, over lower roofs, the station clock-tower, two blocks away, shot suddenly up into the fading sky before them. They saw together that it was twenty minutes past five.

"Oh, hurry! . . . You've caught it, have n't you?"

The speech, for some reason, pressed more than the silence. He answered, shortly: "Remains to be seen." Down the long hill, the little Fordette raced and rattled. The young man's hard breathing became noticeable. And the broad entrance of the station was but half a block away when, with abrupt violence, he threw out his clutch and jammed on his brake.

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"I've missed it!" said he, in a voice that brooked no argument.

Tommy's valuable gift had stopped with a hard bump. Angela did not mind the inconvenience. Her eyes were rewarding her principal friend. Her heart seemed to turn a little within her. Into her cheeks flowed the sweet warm pink.

Together, the two normal young people laughed, suddenly, a little unsteadily. Then, with gayety and some suppressed excitement, they sat discussing an important point, viz.: what to do with their two hours' holiday, before the later train?

It was quickly decided that they should go home. Angela's Home was the one intended; Donald it was who decided the point, as befitted the man. He flung out a commanding hand to notify whom it might concern that he purposed to face about, yet again. And the faithful Fordette, which had set forth with so frail a hope, turned and snorted homeward with the great victory of its career.

Angela sat with shining eyes. She would not have been a woman, she would not have been human but a plaster saint on a pedestal, if her natural happiness had not had the added poignancy of a triumph among her sisters. Just how far Mr. Manford considered himself interested in Miss Carson, she had never yet been able to determine exactly; but that beautiful damsel's position in the scheme of things she, of course, understood perfectly. If her own intuitions had lacked, there were the plain hints Cousin Mary had given her only the other day. Hence, since last week, it was impossible to view Miss Carson other than as a rival, an enemy almost, and one possessing all the odds. For Miss Carson was rich and prominent, with powerful family connections behind and around her, and every possible opportunity and advantage: while she, Angela, — as we know, — had practically not a single rich

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relation on earth, and not one soul to help her but herself. And still — here was Mr. Manford at her side.

They stepped up on the verandah of the home; and the girl remembered the anxiety of the afternoon. But, listening as she opened the front-door, she heard from above the distinct murmur of her mother's voice, talking to her father, and knew again, with fresh relief, that all was well. Mr. Manford having accepted an invitation to stay to supper, she disappeared briefly to confer with Luemma — bribing Luemma with the promise of her old black skirt, in short, to go out and purchase certain extras, in honor of the guest. Returning again, she found her guest standing in the dark hall exactly where she had left him, motionless, a strange absorbed look on his masculine face. And as he met her eyes, there in the dimness by the hatstand, some of the fine color seemed to ebb from his cheek.

They went into the parlor, and sat down on the dented sofa; and her conquest, still, was but part of a day that had belonged to another. But now it quickly became clear that matters had taken a headlong jump, beyond all calculation.

It was, indeed, as if the man himself was profoundly reacted upon by those proofs of his own interest which had so stirred the maiden. Unknown to any one, he had missed his train and important engagements for nothing else than to be here with this girl: and it was as if the fact of itself thrust her far forward in his imagination, wrapped her about with a new startling significance. Men did n't do these things for any girl that came along. Or, possibly, the heady sensations were but the cumulative results of a slower process, and the friendly vehicle now resting at the door had done its decisive work before to-day. At any rate, Angela soon observed that Mr. Manford's behavior was quite embarrassed and peculiar;

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and of course, in the womanly way, his manifestations reacted instantly upon her. The more peculiarly interested Mr. Manford showed himself to be in her, the more peculiarly interesting she found him. Stranger still, the more she found him advancing, the more it was in her mind to retreat. Or, no — not in her mind; it was, of course, much deeper than that. This reluctance could be nothing else than the ancient virginal recoil, somehow remembered, strange latter-day reminiscence of old flights through the woods.

Instinctively, Angela talked commonplaces. The man's replies showed that he hardly listened to her. As she recounted how her father had missed a lecture for the first time to-day, he interrupted brusquely: —

“What's that ring you're wearing?”

Oh, that; oh, an old family ring, she explained, that her mother had given her on a birthday once. He must have seen it a dozen of times. Mr. Manford said, on the contrary, that he had never seen it before in his life. So — was it the voluntary lingering, perhaps, a backward look through the leaves, as it were? — Angela lifted her hand for him to see. The hand was tightly clasped at once. “Where's that other ring — the one you were going to wear till — you know?” Oh, that one? She had given that one back to the person it belonged to. When? Oh, last week. Why? Because she knew then that she could never care for him. “Does that mean you know somebody you — you care for more?” She said that *that* would n't mean anything so very much; and thereupon made an effort to withdraw her hand.

“There is a time for lighting a fire; there is a time for leaving it to burn of itself.” Put otherwise, Angela saw that Mr. Manford was n't even glancing at her ring. However, her proper gesture to recover it accomplished no more than her common-

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places. For the cells and tissues of the gentleman, too, harbored ancestral memories, masculine recollections of agreeable old captures. And the touch and cling of the warm soft *her* had seemed to set them all to singing, drawing him, drawing him. So far from recovering that hand of hers, in fine, the fleeing maiden abruptly lost possession of the other one.

Thus in the storied way, there approached the second Occurrence on a Sofa. It may have been only the last recoil; it may have been that that other occurrence, fruitless contact with the low ideals of man, had permanently injured the womanly trustfulness. There was, at least, a kind of terror among the mingled sensations, as Angela beheld the second event resistlessly approaching.

"Oh, please! . . . You must n't . . ."

And — so sardonically does life twine joy with sorrow in its willful tangle — it was as she spoke these words that Mrs. Flower, standing at the head of the dark stairs, first called Angela's name. However, that call died unheard. The mother's voice was low, the daughter, for her part, could be conscious of nothing but that this dear and imperious Mr. Manford was a very difficult person to resist. Perhaps something in her had been against resistance from the first; but now, over his inconclusive endearments, the pardonable inquiry sighed from her: —

"Oh, why do you do this? Tell me."

Angela's mother stood two steps farther down: "*Angela!* . . . *Angela!*"

But Angela, deep in her great business in the world, once again failed to hear the alarmed low summons. Now sweet nearer speech filled her woman's ear. For Mr. Manford, it is welcome to record, did not run, as the cads run, from that artless challenge: he met it ready, like a soldier and a gentle-

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man. That touch of lips softer than a flower had taught this young man, once and for all, what it was he wanted; huskily his voice came from a swelling chest. "I love you!" said Miss Carson's anointed, unmistakably. And then, indeed, the maiden, unaware of all else, let her conquered cheek rest upon her victor's breast: still and awed with the discovery that she loved, and in the same breath thrilled with the knowledge that she was a Successful Girl.

For our ruling passions are strong in death: more particularly, of course, when the death in question is not our own. . . .

Yet her moment of exquisite peace was brief enough, poor child. Scarcely had the dearest words been spoken, scarcely had she known her awe and her thrill, when all was snatched from her. That other voice outside, more insistent, struck suddenly into her unsteadied mind; too quickly, the surrendered cheek lifted. There was a swift upstarting, the abrupt parting of lovers: and after that fear descending, precipitate and dark as a cloud, over the new great joy.

The course of the succeeding hours was never clear in Angela's memory. There was a rush of unfamiliar and frightening activity. Donald was gone at a run for Dr. Blakie. She herself fled for Mrs. Doremus, on whose judgment her mother much relied. Mysteriously, Mrs. Finchman and poor Jennie appeared, tipping up the steps. Then Mr. Garrott stood suddenly in the hall, with Cousin Mary and Mrs. Wing, all very grave and breathless, they had come so fast. Mr. Garrott must have left very soon; there was nothing for him to do; but Cousin Mary, who had once meant to be a doctor, took charge of everything from the start, and was very helpful. She slept that night in Wallie's room.

At ten o'clock, Donald left her to take Mrs. Wing home; but he, her new comforter, returned directly, in the sweetest way,

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to say good-night. Earlier in the evening Donald had dispatched a telegram to Mrs. Kingsley at Hatton, in which he said: "Serious illness in my family prevents coming." The due excuse was strong enough, in all conscience. But the matter had gone beyond illness now.

Thus it was that the strange day, already memorable to Charles Garrott, memorable, too, to Mary Wing, turned past all counting into the unforgettable day of Angela's life. Thus, into the little house in Center Street, life and death came stepping side by side.

After this day, there came another, and another and another: and still it seemed that death overshadowed life, and joy was overwhelmed in grief. The shadow of this first final parting seemed to close down on the young girl's happiness like a cover, and for a space her engagement was less real to her than the shut office downstairs, the empty seat at the table.

But youth, after all, is made for life, and thereby equipped with a merciful resilience. The passage of time, mere use, worked wonders. And Angela's blessing it was, no doubt, that from the beginning she had others than herself to think about, and the need for much activity. First and foremost, there was Donald, who was with her morning, noon, and night, whose first sight of her in a black dress had moved him almost to tears. It was not fair to the man who had won her that she should give way to a limitless melancholy. Beyond that, loomed the sudden colossal fact of the wedding, which would have to take place almost immediately; for her duty now was to her future husband, and the demands of his work must overcome her girlish shrinkings from such unwonted haste. And a wedding must mean clothes, at all times, and

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clothes, even at the plainest and simplest, must mean some thought and some diversion.

Insensibly, death turned back to life again. The great confused day of Angela's life was a week old; it was two weeks old; it was three. And winter now was fading from the softening air. . . .

They were the quietest weeks imaginable. Except her mother and her *fiancé*, Angela saw no one for days together, not even Mary Wing. For Mary, as it happened, was sick at this time — her first illness in five years, so Mrs. Wing said. She had caught cold, it seemed, in the wet at the funeral, and the cold had developed into quite a serious attack of bronchitis, which kept her in bed two weeks or more. Thus the young couple, in their mourning, were left completely to themselves. In their isolation, in the still little parlor, they were planning at great length about their future, going over and over their new common problems from every possible angle. And the more Angela's fatherlessness was accepted as a permanent fact in the order of the future, the clearer it became that this fact must color and affect everything else.

In chief, this question of the girl's came more and more to the front of the loverly discussions: How could she go off to wild remote Wyoming, now that her mother was a widow?

XXII

IT was March now, the mild March of an early spring. There came new days, zephyrous and sweet. All the world seemed to love a lover. But other matters were afoot in the world, too, necessarily: afoot even in the old coterie itself.

Charles Garrott, descending Miss Grace's steps on an afternoon that looked like April and felt like May, thought not of young Romance. What with the groom's absorption, and Mary Wing's unprecedented illness, the old principal friend had, indeed, heard little or nothing of the happy pair through these days. He had accepted the event, long since, once and for all, with fatalistic philosophy; and though the nuptials were now but six days distant, they were far from his mind in this moment, as, his hated tutor's stint done, he turned his long stride hurriedly toward Olive Street.

Charles, as we know, was not a caller. It was true that he had hardly seen Mary Wing since the day when she, the heroine of his write-ups, had so suddenly indicated herself as his larger heroine as well; true also that, in the engrossed and very fruitful solitude of the Studio succeeding, he had thought of her much, bookishly and otherwise. But these facts had not changed the essential nature of Charles. Still he was not a caller; still when he rang people's door-bells, it was morally certain that he had definite matters to urge upon their notice.

And so it was to-day. Charles, in a word, had conceived a new plan for helping Mary.

That she, the admirable, by way of reward for her smashing

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denial of the Ego, should find herself fixed for life as a grammar-school teacher, "demoted" and disgraced: this state of things had naturally seemed unendurable to Mary's good friend. That Mary did not need his help, that he recognized her now as competent, in the finest sense, to manage her own affairs henceforward, seemed to have little or nothing to do with the case. Hence, while she lay withdrawn from the battle of life with bronchitis, the helper had been elaborately at work on new lines: stalking School Board members for Mary, in fine, with great cunning. But this plan, unluckily, his fourth and most troublesome, had lately collapsed about his ears. It had cost the young man much valued time, and not a little money for lunches; and the net practical result of it had been to leave him angrily conscious of "influence," mysteriously pervasive, and by no means possessed by him. A friendly disposition toward Mary, personally, seemed to be everywhere joined to an unshakable conviction that she could not hope to get back to the High School before the fall, if then. Such was the fruit of five diplomatic conferences: the sixth had stopped Charles short. Young Dr. Hazen, who was almost as much Mary's representative on the School Board as Senff was Mysinger's, informed him that Mary herself had already canvassed over the Board with him, Hazen, and abandoned all hope in that quarter.

What, indeed, could he do for Mary Wing that she could not do better for herself?

The fifth plan concerned Public Opinion again, and a new use of the gift he had. It inspired less confidence in its author than any that had preceded it. And it was to submit it, in advance, for Mary's discussion and approval, that Charles now presented himself at the Wings' front door.

However, he met with a disappointment. Mary was out.

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She had gone to the Flowers' soon after luncheon — unexpectedly, it appeared — and, at half-past four, was not yet back. That seemed more or less surprising. Mrs. Wing, who had answered his ring, looked somewhat concerned, he thought. However, as it was agreed that Mary could not remain with Angela indefinitely, the caller decided, after brief hesitation, — for the Studio allured in these days as never before, — to wait for her.

So he came again into the sitting-room, and Mrs. Wing sat to keep him company. Naturally, there was but one subject for their conversation.

Charles liked Mrs. Wing. She always began every conversation with him by asking: "And how did you find your dear mother on your last visit?" Mary's mother had never seen his mother, and possibly never would, but (being a frightful sentimentalist) she assumed that all mothers are dear. It was next her habit to inquire whether Charles had written any stories lately, and why they never saw anything of his in the magazines. Such things tended to create a bond. And recently the tie had been strengthened by an unusually intimate talk on the subject of Mary, whose surrender of her great prize had, indeed, upset and distressed her mother even more than Charles had predicted.

To-day, again, Mrs. Wing appeared somewhat unlike her usual calm self. She omitted her inquiry about Charles's writing altogether (thus denying him his chance to mention the recent rather gratifying acceptance of Dionysius, no less), and the flattering things she kept saying of Angela had, to his ear, a faintly tentative ring, requiring his confirmation. But his first vague wonder, whether anything could have happened, was soon lost in other reactions. Thus, he had to wince a little in agreeing, once more, that Donald's future wife was a

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thoroughly "womanly girl." Few authorities enjoy denying the ripe sum of their own best thinking. But a later remark of Mrs. Wing's took a much deeper twist in his mind.

"Really," she said, slowly and dubiously, following a pause, "I have but one fault to find with Donald's choice, and that is — well, frankly, Angela seemed to care so little for Paulie and Neddy Warder. . . . And Donald was such a goose over them, dear boy."

As he did not see his way clear to replying to that, "I hope you're mistaken, ma'am," Charles merely smiled vaguely, and said nothing. But what he thought, on the delicate implication, was nothing about Angela at all — only that Donald had been rather less of a goose over Paulie and Neddy than Mary Wing had been. . . .

Then the sitting-room clock ticked for a space, while Mrs. Wing communed with herself. And Charles, gazing out into the park, waiting for his friend, thought how it was that a young woman's work — even an extraordinary young woman like Mary — always subtly lacked just that ultimate touch of grim seriousness which justified the "fierce hackings away" of a man. For, as an abstract truth, there was positively no such thing as a Permanent Spinster: and women who were not spinsters, and normally desired Paulies and Neddies of their own, could not possibly fulfill their longings without serious complications to themselves, then and thenceforward. It was no human or escapable "tyranny" that had made Woman, to this degree, to her glory or her disaster, forever the victim of her sex: and, by the same token, fixed the final responsibility for the economic support of the family upon the shoulders of the predestined and uncompromised provider, Man. . . .

Yes, then and thenceforward . . . Could you, for example, imagine Mary Wing — who had had chances to marry before

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now, who might reasonably marry at any time — could you picture Mary packing off her three little darlings to a crèche every morning, that she might go and grow her soul at a desk somewhere? Maybe so; but he wondered. . . .

He was thinking whether he could contrive to discuss the crèche and endowment arguments in his novel — for of course you could make a story carry just a certain amount of “solid stuff,” and only dreary prigs of readers would lie still while you tried to feed them forcibly with a spoon — when all at once Mrs. Wing, near by, was heard to strike her hands together, with a little ejaculation.

“Oh, Mr. Garrott! I do believe Mary’s at the High School all the time!”

That made the thoughtful visitor turn swiftly enough.

“At the *High School*?”

“It’s so stupid of me!” she explained, with some relief, it seemed. “I’ve just remembered. You know, she never cleared her papers and things out of her office closet there, and it got on her mind when she was sick. And to-day, when she came in from school, she told me she had arranged with Mr. Geddie over the telephone — the man who has her office now — to go and attend to it this afternoon. Yes, that’s it — I’m sure!”

“Oh!” said Charles, not a little perplexed. “And then, you mean — she decided to go to the Flowers’ instead?”

“Well, to go there first — I suppose. Donald came in just as she finished lunch — to talk with her about something. Then, when he had gone, Mary told me she was going down to see Angela. It was all rather unexpected — and somehow the High School went out of my mind completely.”

“But I hope nothing’s happened?” he said quickly.

“Well — I don’t know that there has.”

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Perplexity passed at once into the certainty that something had happened. The instant thought in the young man's mind was: What's Angela done now? Having risen, he gazed with direct inquiry at his elderly friend. But her eyes glanced away from him; and she put him off further by repeating: "It was stupid of me to keep you."

Mrs. Wing added that Mary was certainly at the High School now. Charles, turning disturbed away, remarked that perhaps he would still be in time to help with the office cleaning, and she said that was very kind of him.

"She 'll be glad to see you, I know. Indeed, she has appreciated all you've done for her — those beautiful articles, for example — more than you quite realize, perhaps."

But the young man shook his head, and said with a kind of bitterness: "I've never done anything for her in my life."

And then, as he took the lady's hand to say good-bye, he asked abruptly: "But why should n't I know what's happened, Mrs. Wing?"

"Oh," said Mary's mother, and hesitated:

"Yes, why should n't you?" said she, and hesitated again.

"Well," she began again slowly, "it's nothing so serious, as I said, — just a fresh disappointment for Mary, — that is really all it amounts to with me. Very likely Donald has intimated to you that he was not going to Wyoming?"

The caller stared at her dumbfounded.

"Not going to Wyoming! Why! — why not?"

"Well, he feels, in his new circumstances," said Mrs. Wing, uneasily, "that it would be more suitable to accept the position in New York. But — I really had little opportunity to discuss it with Mary. She seemed — to be frank — much disturbed, she had so set her heart on this work in the West —"

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"More *suitable!* . . . How?"

"Well, for one thing — it does n't seem fair to separate Angela so far from her mother, as would have to be the case in Wyoming."

But into Charles's mind there had suddenly popped back a stray remark let fall by Donald, in the only talk he had had with him for weeks: "I tell you, Charlie, it's pretty rough on a girl to be dragged off to live in a shack nine miles from nowhere!" A mere passing observation, that he had paid no attention to at the time — but was that it? Was that the reason why another of Mary Wing's most cherished plans must suddenly cave in?

He stood utterly dismayed.

"So Mrs. Flower," he asked, with some want of composure, "is going to live with them in New York?"

"Oh, no, — not for the present, I believe. She feels, and so do I, that young couples should be left to themselves to make their start. But they will be so near that they can visit back and forth — which would be impossible if Donald —"

"But Mrs. Flower can't live here by herself?"

"Well, no," said Mrs. Wing, and fussed with books on the table. "That has been the great problem, of course. Dr. Flower's death has complicated the situation sadly. I believe the present plan is for Wallace — the boy, you know — to come back and live with her — just for the next few months, while Donald and Angela are finding themselves."

Charles stood without a word. But perhaps his look betrayed what he felt, for Mrs. Wing threw out her hands with a helpless gesture, and cried: "Well, he is the man of the family now!"

"However," she added, turning away, "perhaps Mary will be able to hit upon some other arrangement. That is what

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she went there for — to talk the whole situation over with Angela."

But Charles, who had always thought of Angela as "soft" and Mary as "hard," seemed somehow quite certain that that talk had accomplished nothing. With brief speech, he moved toward the door. Doubtless struck with the fixed gravity of his look, Mary's mother, who had been an old-fashioned girl herself once, said with an effort, and yet firmly too: —

"It is life itself that is hard. Marriage means — readjustment. That is the only comment to make."

It was precisely the point on which the silent young man did not agree with her. To him, as to her, all the sharp force of this tidings was, indeed, in Mary's new overthrow. And yet for the moment there seemed to be room in him for nothing else but comments on the vast void in Mary's so different cousin.

Angela was wanting in the responsible qualities of a full-grown human being. Her fatal lack was in human worth. It was the sum of all he had thought about her since the day he had called upon her poor father. It was the cap and climax of all he meant to say about her in his New Novel.

So Charles took his leave with an abstracted face.

In the drawer of the Studio table, there was growing now, night by night, a fresh stack of manuscript, steady and firm upon a new Line. Mary Wing had straightened out this Line for Charles: Mary who had taught him once and for all that a woman could be finely independent, and still uphold the interdependence which held the world together. Yet Mary, the admirable, was after all but his "contrast" and his foil: it was for the peculiarities of her opposite that he had finally whetted his pencil. And, in the intense and retrospective thinking which went along with the best writing he had ever yet done,

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the young man considered that he had got to the bottom of Angela's case, and her sisters', quite thoroughly explored the souls of the Waiting Women of Romance.

But this news of her, these final touches as to the Nice Girl's brother and her future husband, seemed to fling at him, as it were, a last conclusive chapter for his "Notes on Women." That marriage meant readjustments he, the authority, doubtless understood as well as another. That this marriage might make it necessary for Wallie Flower to be re-adjusted out of his education: even that was allowed as conceivable. But that the very first act of Angela's new life should be to influence her husband in the direction of his weakness, and, as it seemed, of her own good comfort — what was this, indeed, but a brilliant certification of all the grounds of his own attack? . . .

The author's face, the author's swift feet, were set toward the High School. His errand — now — was to cheer up Mary Wing. "Make her look on the bright side": so her mother had urged at parting. That necessity remained as a soreness and dull anger through all the young man's consciousness. And yet, in nearly a mile's walk, he hardly thought of Mary once.

He was surveying, as if from a new peak, the unhappy situation of Home-Makers with their Homes yet to seek: the considerable army of the involuntary spinsters of leisure. And more than ever now, perhaps, he saw these sisters as a Type, pathetically marked: the innocent creatures, the helpless victims, of a dying ideal of themselves.

Here was poor little Angela, his Novel's case in point. She was born a human being, she was born a being with sex. And in twenty-six years' contact with the rich and human world, she had gathered nothing to her sum beyond what tended to enhance her sex's attraction. So selecting, she had

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permanently lost the fullness of her double birthright: all in nice, unconscious and inevitable response to an environment which continually assured her that being a woman was enough.

If life had been real and bright and turbulent around her, and she sat within and polished her pink nails, it was because she was a woman. If she was given no education beyond the demands of provincial parlor-talk, no training for her hands, no occupation for her head, if no one ever thought of her as a full-statured being who must pay her way in substantial coin; this, again, was because she was a woman, and a woman (if any one bothered with argument at all) some day might — or might not — be the mother of children. Surely it had not been Angela's fault if she was early apprised, though through a sweet mist, that she had but one faculty of any value in the world's market; not her fault if, amid general approval, she innocently spent her youth and idleness in tricking out her value, and bringing it steadily to the attention of the only beings who could have a use for it. Least of all was it her fault if her peculiar business, and her odd specialized training, were bounded, not by marriage, but only by a wedding-day. For the final unnaturalness, the crowning wrong in her situation was exactly this: that, being told that she must be a wife or nothing, she was coincidentally told that being a wife was a matter which a nice girl did well to know nothing about. . . .

The author, sharpening his phrases, walked in angry abstraction. He passed old acquaintances as if he had never seen them before. . . .

Oh, it was true (he conceded), a thousand times true, that many women of this crude bringing-up did develop, when their time came, a splendid competence over all their special field. But it was a little too much to assume that every creature in

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the female form could be counted on to perform such a feat of pure character. And Romance, which gallantly or indifferently made these exact assumptions, defending and cherishing the queer but comfortable orientalizing with the cloak of false "womanliness," scarcely pretended to believe its own agreeable fictions.

Here was Angela again, his little case in point. Angela was reasonably good-looking, adopted a flattering attitude toward eligible young men, knew her place, and kept no opinions on matters of interest to her betters; hence she was called a "womanly" woman. Being womanly implied the possession of certain home-making virtues, present and to come; hence it was assumed, and she inevitably and naïvely assumed, that she possessed these virtues. Odd as these deductions sounded, he himself, he could not deny, had swallowed them once, — that night at the Redmantle Club, — romantically accepting the appearance for the reality, willfully investing the humdrum commonplace with the full beauties of the ideal. But for him, at least, all obstinate optimisms concerning *La Femme* had exploded with a bang in a party-call. You did not gather figs of thistles. And now it was no longer conceivable to him that she who in quarter of a century had developed no human interests, tastes, resources at all, who seemed to lack even an average interest in Paulie and Neddy Warder, should all at once blossom marvelously into the responsible and "justified" matron. No, for him, Angela at forty, having "let herself go" now that nothing more was expected of her, sat forever in a room that she had not swept, plaintively reminding a fatigued Donald of the priceless gift of her Self.

And Donald, though his interest in exploring the creature once so elaborately mystified was long since utterly exhausted, would probably take that argument amiss no more than

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Dr. Flower had done. Romantic males, with their poor opinion of the worth of a woman, might hope for true domesticity, true maternity: but in their hearts they had thought all along, with a wink, that "possession" was enough. It was "what a woman was for."

But in that they were mistaken. Possession was not enough. Being a female was not enough. Great heavens! — thought Charles Garrott, and muttered as he strode. . . . What a shame, what a staggering waste of rich human potentiality, to classify and file away one half the world as only "*marital rights!*"

Was n't it about time to stop all this? Was n't it time for modern writers to pull away the rosy veils and let the Angelas meet themselves — while they could still do something about it? Did n't it lay up needless future misery to go on deceiving helpless women into putting a preposterous overvaluation upon the mere possession of their sex? Lastly, and above all, was n't it a colossal libel on all womanhood to accept the strut and mannerism born of this deception as the true essentials of "womanliness"?

Womanly! . . . Why, womanliness was a prime human quality, integrally necessary to the work of the world — a great positive quality, not a little passive one, productive, not sterile, of the spirit, not of the body. Womanliness was the mother and guardian of great social virtues: of a finer and deeper emotion, of more sensitive perceptions, of a subtler intuition of the sources of life, of an all-mothering sympathy, a more embracing tenderness. Womanliness had no more to do with the light bright plumage of the mating-season than a waxed mustache had to do with being a soldier.

There was a time, he understood well, when the fact of womanhood had implied substantialities: when being a wife

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meant also being a domestic factory superintendent, not to mention being a continuous mother. That time was gone forever. You might argue for the passing, you might argue against it: meanwhile it had happened. Inexorable economics had dried the heart from the old tradition; and in the sudden vacuum thus created there moved and thrived anomalous little creatures who never knew that they had lost all touch with reality. Untroubled by a rumor of change, Angela held contentedly to the remnant, a low ideal of herself. But it was not so with her finer sisters. For the passing of the old womanliness of four walls and dependence had flung a window wide to a nobler prospect and a vaster horizon. And already the woman of to-morrow was rising in her lusty strength to prove her fundamental racial virtue, her womanliness, upon nothing less than the world.

Well, had n't he told Mary long ago that the object of all this was only to make women more like themselves? In that, he would stake his life, he had been exactly right.

A concrete High School smote across the vision of the seer, and the cloud-stepper's feet trod but the hard sidewalk again.

Groping for truth upon his favorite subject, he had been briefly lost to the issues of the practical: he had a power of concentration, as he would have been the first to admit. But the flight of his rhetoric was, after all, only an incident of his indignation and distress; which sentiments, he knew all the time, yet had to be faced on their own account. And now, as he rounded his last corner, and his destination rose abruptly before him, Charles recalled for what he had been walking so fast and far.

Or, no . . . What was he coming for exactly?

It was all very fine and easy, as a writer, to polish up de-

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molishing phrases for poor little Angela. But what did he, as a man and a friend, have to do for Mary Wing?

The helper crossed the street in the lingering vernal sunshine. Here was the great building where Mary had once held an important place, where she came to-day, by special permission only, to remove the last traces of that association. Now that plan with which he had set out to-day looked back at the young man with rather a small face, and wry. He had never thought much of the plan: only to persuade Mary to let him make public the facts about her rejected honor from the Education League — legitimate news for the papers, fine peg for a new publicity campaign, etc. But all at once he knew that he was n't even going to mention this to Mary now. With what words, then, did he rush to her in her fresh disaster? Doubtless to say, "I'm awfully sorry." A stirring exploit. Had n't she shown him on that other day that she, the strong, had no desire for his fruitless sympathies?

The truth was, and he had known it from the beginning, he rather shrank from seeing Mary at all now, in the stress of this final defeat. Final, yes: for while Angela was attaining success to the full limit of her small conceptions, every aspiration that Mary had cherished, literally, had one by one gone down. And if this last was not the worst, perhaps, neither was it the easiest to bear. No, if anything on earth was calculated to harden and embitter a woman who could not easily yield, surely it must be her own so easy overthrow by pink cheeks and soft, empty eyes.

And these white-stone steps Charles now ascended had for him a reminiscent power, by no means comforting. The last time he had trod these steps, he had sworn, in anger, that he, single-handed, would force the School Board to bring Mary

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Wing back here, without delay. Mary would have a right to smile, if she ever heard of that. She had been thrown out of this building only because she was a woman: under all the argument, that was positively the reason. And now three months had passed, and he, her helper, came to say, "Well, I'm very sorry. . . ."

Charles pushed through the tall bronze doors of the High School, where he had seen Miss Trevenna one day, strode long-faced into the dim spaces of the entrance hall. It was five o'clock: the whole building seemed silent and empty. A rare sense of impotence within him, troubled also by a secret shrinking, the young man went stalking across the corridor toward the stairways. But just here he encountered a brief diversion.

A glazed door at his left, at which he happened to be looking, came suddenly open. The door was marked, in neat gold letters, PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE. And reasonably enough, the jaunty figure that came stepping out proved to be none other than the principal himself.

Always a hard but uncomplaining worker, Mr. Mysinger was evidently just leaving for the day. Light overcoat on his arm, stick and gloves in his hand, he whistled blithely to himself, to the tune of labor done. But at the sight of Charles Garrott here on his domain, he checked his gay air, stood still in his official door.

Over half the corridor, the two men gazed at each other. And Mr. Mysinger's specious face, after the first surprised stare, assumed the smile of amity and pleasure.

"Ah, Garrott! Well met!"

Charles had halted, too, without premeditation. The chance meeting here was natural enough. All that gave it the force of coincidence was that he had in that instant been thinking,

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not for the first time, of Mary Wing's old saying of this man: "If he let either Board know that he wanted me back, it would be done to-morrow. . . ."

"I've wanted to see you for some time," said Mr. Mysinger, smiling and easy — "about a certain matter of common interest —"

On the great stairway the sound of descending feet was heard, those of a belated teacher, doubtless. But neither man looked to see. And within the sedentary Charles there was slowly spreading a vast iciness, akin to a bodily nausea.

"Can't you step into the office half a minute?"

"Certainly."

Mary's former principal stood aside from his door, bowing, with elaborate welcome. Charles, advancing, passed through it, passed through the anteroom, stepped silent into an office large as a magnate's. Here he stood, just inside the door. Mysinger, following with his faint swagger, went by him toward his handsome flat desk.

"Have a cigar?"

"Thanks, no."

The good-looking principal leaned against his desk, facing his visitor with the same air of too good-humored assurance.

"Garrott, let's be frank," said he. "You feel that I am hostile to one of your friends, and stand in the way of her advancement in the schools. You are really mistaken in that. So far as my personal opinions might carry weight, I am anxious for her — for all the teachers — to go forward just as fast as their abilities would justify. But as you know, Garrott, the Board and the Superintendent settle all these matters, and I myself am only one of the teachers under their direction."

He paused encouragingly. But the young man at the door

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only continued to look at him with the same lidless fixedness.

"At the same time," said the principal, a rather more resolute note tingeing his voice, "you appreciate as well as I that teachers can't be picked up and moved about like chessmen. We must have some — permanence — some constancy — to insure efficiency. And frankly, my personal judgment — after fifteen years' experience, and considering the brilliant work of Johnson Geddie — is that you could hardly hope to see your friend promoted — well, immediately."

"So you would advise —?"

Mysinger's eyelid seemed to flutter a little: he really did have a purpose, it seemed.

"I am told — ahem! — that your friend has recently received a most flattering offer — from elsewhere?"

How had he known this? "Well?"

"Well, the party in question," said he, with his set smile, "seems to have a certain prejudice against me. She refuses to speak to me, in fact, — why, I cannot imagine. All the same, I am, and always have been, her sincere well-wisher. And after earnest thought, I honestly feel sure that her friends would make no mistake if they urged her not to let slip this — ahem — well-deserved promotion. I thought," he added, his gaze a threat now, "I'd better bring the point to your attention."

Charles's fixed eyes did not waver. But before them there unrolled a thin gray mist, briefly shutting the principal from his sight. The mist queerly turned red, and became shot with fiery sparks. Then all cleared; and, behind him, the young man's hand felt for, and touched, the open door. Gently, moving only his arm, he shut it. And it seemed to him that he must be turning white inside.

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"You," said he, "are more used to insulting women than I am."

Mysinger flung up a deprecating hand. "Tut, tut, my dear sir! Talk of that sort does no good whatever, I assure you. You would do well to look at the matter in a sensible way, and believe that I speak — *Here! What're you doing there?*"

The principal had suddenly heard a strange sound: the click of his own key in his own lock, in fine. At the same time, his visitor was observed to be regarding him with a new and peculiar intentness, arresting and significant. And his only reply to his host's indignant inquiry was to drop the key in question in his coat-pocket.

Now Mary's old conqueror, and his own, had straightened from that lounging swagger. His voice rang more angrily: "You —! What do you think you're up to, anyway —?"

"I think I'm going to beat you to a pulp," said the author, — "*you puppy!*"

And he started forward with a kind of bound, like one who goes to fill, at last, a long-felt need.

XXIII

MARY WING was considered a reliable person. When she announced that she would clean out an office closet on a certain day, you could make your plans on the thing's being done. And to-day — if her usual principles might have weakened a little — Mary was further bound by the definite engagement she had made. As Charles had reflected, a demoted grammar-school teacher could not walk in and out of a principal's office like one who had some rights there.

Mary had not remained at the Flowers' interminably, after all. She had entered the High School before Charles Garrott had arrived at Olive Street, and had been upstairs for half an hour, when Charles, following on to help her, strode through the great bronze doors. Nevertheless, she was a full hour behind the time mentioned to Mr. Johnson Geddie over the telephone, and this increased her hope that her only too obliging successor would not be found waiting for her. However, Mr. Geddie was found waiting for her; very much so, in fact. Nothing could have exceeded the exuberance of his courtesy, and nothing could have been less welcome.

The new assistant principal was a plump, white person, in whose face a reddish mustache and gold-rimmed spectacles — his own personal addenda, as it were — were the only salient features. Not brilliant, he was rising by character, evinced in an unconquerable optimism. "Keep a-smiling, brother — it costs you nothing!" — so Mr. Geddie's roguish eyes seemed continually to say. But perhaps they seemed to say it more

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than normally to-day, by way of striking a happy average with the quite unsmiling late incumbent.

Mary, during her brief tenancy, had stored here a long accumulation of printed matter, chiefly duplicate files of "The New School," with sundry assorted leaflets of the Education Reform League. Her task to-day was to go through these files, destroy what was no longer useful to her, and pack the rest for removal. Her successor had thoroughly prepared for her. There on the floor was the packing-case, there on the floor was a table to sit at, there against the wall stood a step-ladder. But Mr. Geddie would not weary in well-doing. The moment he understood what the proposition was, as he termed it, he said that, of course, he would help Miss Wing. Refusals drowned in a sea of smiles. Allow Miss Wing to climb that rickety ladder, and lift down those heavy stacks of magazines? Positively, she must not ask him that. Trouble? A pleasure, Miss Wing; a genu-wine pleasure.

He had his way, as people of strong sunny character always do. Mary, having overcome the impulse to make an excuse and abandon the enterprise, sat at the little table. Kind Mr. Geddie went up and down the ladder, fetching her dusty armfuls to sort over. In the intervals, for he had the shorter end of the job, he was down on his knees beside her, brightly stacking discarded "New Schools" into piles against the wall.

The work went forward steadily, on the woman's part almost in silence. That, however, made no difference. It was the man's power to be able to talk more than enough for two, and he did. As the old assistant principal grew steadily more quiet, the new one seemed increasingly buoyant. And it seemed to Mary that she had been listening to his conversation for a long, long time, at the moment when she heard him suddenly exclaim, from the ladder: —

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"Well, well! Look who's here! Come for the spring-cleaning, Mr. Garrott? Ha, ha!"

She, in her inner absorption, had failed to hear the approaching feet. But at that she raised her head, with a kind of jerk.

"Don't mind the dust, Mr. Garrott — it eats all right! Ha, ha! Walk in!"

Mr. Garrott stood silent in the office door, looking at Miss Wing. The eyes of the old friends briefly met. Something in the young man's appearance vaguely arrested Mary Wing. She had noted, as her glance lifted, the torn glove on his right hand. Now she was remotely aware that the face looking back at her so intently appeared somehow subtly changed: there was something faintly wrong with it, it seemed. But such details Mary's consciousness hardly registered at all. All in one flash, she wondered how he happened to be here, thought how good it was of him to come, and knew that she had never been less glad to see anybody in her life.

"Good-afternoon," said she.

"How'do, Miss Mary?" said Charles; and then started forward. "How are you, Mr. Geddie? I seem to be rather late to help with the good work."

"Yes, sirree! — Can't come in at the eleventh hour and take our credit away! Can he, Miss Wing? — ha, ha! All over but the applause!"

However, Mr. Geddie did not know himself for a tactful man for nothing. Observing that Miss Wing continued to drop magazines on the floor in silence, and that her young man there did n't seem to know what to do with himself, he gracefully adopted a new position. From the third round of the ladder, he made a roguish address, the meat of which was that there was a whole corner left of the bottom shelf, and if Mr. Garrott insisted, etc.

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"I'll relieve you with pleasure," said Charles, coldly.

So Mr. Geddie lumbered down from the ladder, wiped his hands on his pocket-handkerchief and re-attached his cuffs. He implored Miss Wing to make herself absolutely at home in his office, assured her, not once but three times, that John the porter, on the floor below, would be positively gratified to do any service for her, however small. In the moment of parting, he volunteered a new civility.

"Why, here, Mr. Garrott!" he hastily exclaimed, "your coat's all dusty in the back! That won't do! Just a minute while I get my whisk —"

But Miss Wing's young man interrupted him rudely.

"No, I'm not dusty at all! Thanks — don't trouble."

Another person who did n't know the value of a smile, clearly. And the man *was* dusty, of course. Well, no affair of his, of course. Mr. Geddie kept a-smiling.

"Well, good people!" said he. "Olive oil!"

When he had got a polite distance down the hall, Miss Wing's young man shut the office door upon him. So at last came privacy. For the first time, since the unforgotten afternoon last month, Charles Garrott stood alone with his admirable heroine.

He moved toward her, deliberating.

Downstairs there, he had been having five of the most engrossing, the most completely satisfying, minutes of his life. Being able to come upstairs at all, he had come in the spiritual state of his stimulating experience. Over all that was unsettled and unhappy, there persisted in him a fierce young elation. By the oddest luck, he was not here empty-handed, after all: he came with something rather better than a hope to give. And doubtless — since he was incurably a sentence-maker — there had already come into his head discreet phrases

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with which to communicate the hope, at least: phrases which, though gallantly suppressing his own exploits, might yet be somewhat tinged with a protector's strength.

But all this dropped from Charles's mind in the instant when Mary raised her head over the table, and looked at him.

He had seen his friend for a few minutes on Friday, her first day up and about. But that passing glimpse, it seemed, could hardly have counted. For now her gaze had an unexpected power for him: the sight of her came on him with a sort of impact, as if this were some one he had heard about often, but never before seen. Undoubtedly, that small phenomenon was due to the amount he had been thinking about her of late, behind her back, as it were. But beyond all this, the particular look of Mary's face had made him instantly certain that, whatever she had gone to struggle with Angela about to-day, she had, indeed, been routed. And that he had not miscalculated the effect of this upon her, he was also certain from the first sound of her voice. . . .

Mary did not look up as her helper advanced, or cease the work of her hands. But it was she who spoke first:—

"How did you happen to come here?"

"I've been to your house. Your mother told me you were here."

She said, with a curious stilted politeness: "It was very good of you to come. But really you must not wait for me, please. I have a good deal more to do — a great deal more — and it is work of a sort that I have to do alone."

"Miss Mary," said Charles, "your mother told me, at my request, what has happened this afternoon."

Mary flinched, just perceptibly. But her voice, when she spoke, seemed harder than before.

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"Well, it's the fact. That's all there is to say. There is n't anything more to discuss."

"I don't mean to discuss it, of course. There was just one thing I thought of — a — sort of suggestion."

Finding himself neither questioned nor forbidden, he continued: "Do you think it would be such a bad way out of the — the difficulty, if Donald were just to go on here for a while?"

Still Mary waited, hardly encouraging him, examining a "New School," silently laying it down in the packing-case at her feet.

"I know you feel," said Charles, inspecting the top of her hat, "that settling down to this consulting work, in a city that offers so many distractions all the time, won't be a good thing for Donald — from any point of view. Staying here won't take the place of the chance with Gebhardt he's throwing away, of course — that's pretty serious. Still, there ought to be plenty of good work for him to do here — is n't there? — for a few months, a year or two, if necessary. That would give him — and you — a little time to adjust things to — the new conditions. And then from the point of view of the Flowers, too, — of Mrs. Flower, in fact, — it occurred to me it might n't be a bad sort of working compromise. . . . What do you think?"

"I think it is very sensible," she replied, with the same labored courtesy. "It is what I suggested, too."

"Oh," said Charles, and paused. "But Donald did n't want to give up Blake & Steinert, I suppose?"

"I have n't suggested it to Donald."

That brought a considerable silence.

"It's — settled, then?"

"It was settled last week."

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A curious let-down feeling took possession of the young man. He pressed his hand to his forehead; and then for the first time was aware that his head ached furiously. In the same moment, his eye was unpleasantly caught by his burst-out gloves. Having stared at his hands for a second, he silently stripped off the gloves, balled them, and pitched the ball into a waste-basket near by.

"I'll just have a look into this closet for myself," said he, turning away. "I don't believe Geddie —"

"No! — please don't! — don't trouble! I really don't need any help, thank you. I don't . . ."

Her wish to be alone was all but woundingly plain to him. And still it seemed to Charles physically impossible to turn now and walk out of the door. So, not looking at her, he answered in a peculiarly mild manner that, of course, this was n't help at all, only a little indulgence of himself, which she really must n't refuse him. And while he yet spoke, allowing no opportunity for such refusal, he hung his hat on Mr. Geddie's hook, and all the forepart of him disappeared upward into the closet.

After an interval rather longer than necessary, he re-emerged to view, a few periodicals in one hand, a faded bundle of typewritten papers in the other.

"Geddie's made a clean sweep. There's hardly another armful."

His manner was almost as cheery as Geddie's own. His "note" was to go ahead as if nothing had happened.

"Put them here?" asked Charles.

Mary Wing's arms quivered a little on the table.

"Put them *anywhere*! It doesn't make the *least* difference!"

So Charles laid his burden down on the table, and quietly

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went up the ladder again. Here, for a space, he pretended to be impossibly busy over nearly empty shelves.

And then, out of the silence behind him, he heard his friend's voice, painfully stiff, somewhat strained.

"You see — you ought n't to have come to see me to-day. I — I'm not fit for society. I tried to warn you. I have n't had time — to get philosophical yet."

The helper spoke into the dusty closet: "Well, you don't need to get philosophical with me. I'm pretty mad myself — as far as that goes."

"I was n't prepared for it — at all. . . . And then I've been beating my head against it — like a fool — all afternoon."

Well he knew Mary's horror of weakness, her warranted confidence in her own self-control. Well he understood her regret for that uniquely sharp speech of hers. Was it this, a novel impulse to justify herself in his eyes, that seemed to force her on, beyond his expectation and against her own will?

"But don't suppose I went there expecting to have my own way about everything — manage them around like children. I did n't. I went respectfully. I went to beg. But it was no use."

Silence: and then the hard voice went on rapidly: —

"She and Donald had talked it all over, and decided that it would be best for his career to go to New York. She and Donald . . . I *did* think that, as I was planning Donald's work when she was still in short dresses, my opinion might have some weight with her. And I thought, just as you did, that something might be saved if they stayed here for the present — kept the house and all the rest of it. And then, of course, I lost my temper — that makes twice. . . . I reminded her how she had told me once that nothing could induce *her* to leave her mother, as a widow. . . . What was the use? Of course she

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only cried, and said it was hopeless to try to explain to me — how differently a woman felt about all these things when she was going to be married. I believe she said I was incapable of understanding the new emotions that came with a great love."

That, indeed, seemed a romantic description of the mild, chance product of the Fordette. However, the replete young authority only said: —

"Then I suppose it's great love that taught her engineering so quickly — and all Donald's little peculiarities?"

Mary Wing made no answer. Her capable small hands took up the literature lately provided by Charles. And when she spoke, it was as if his unaccustomed acrimony had met and destroyed her own.

"Oh, it's natural that we should see everything differently. She is really a sweet-natured girl. I'm sorry already for what I said to her. . . . And her not wanting to stay here — you must n't think that's just a selfish whim — just wanting to live in New York. Of course, what she wants is to have Donald to herself — to have their young married life to themselves. And my going there to give advice to-day — naturally that made her more certain than ever that she could never have that here — with me just around the corner. She let me understand that, finally. She intimated that Donald had said as much — he was tired of being managed. . . . Oh, it's perfectly natural, perfectly right. To-morrow, I'll accept it easily enough. . . . As I say — I have n't had much time."

He was more touched by that speech than everything that had gone before, yet more resolved, too, not to say, "I'm sorry."

"As a matter of fact," he asked straightforwardly, "what was decided — as to Mrs. Flower?"

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"It's not decided yet, at all. However, I have a plan — another suggestion — which it seems to me might meet some of the difficulties."

"Are n't there friends or relatives here that she might stay with for a time?"

"That's it. I think I can persuade her to live with us — till we have a chance to see how all this —"

"With *you*?"

"It's just a hope, as I say. I did n't think of it till just now. Mother is very fond of her. And Wallie can't give up college, of course. That would be — quite the worst thing."

The school-teacher spoke with characteristic matter-of-factness. If she was adding final touches to the portraits of two women, she did it, certainly, with supreme unconsciousness. In the brief stillness of the office, she efficiently neared the end of her task. The top of her table was almost bare, the litter on the floor was deep. And now she spoke again, dryly and quite conclusively.

"At any rate, nothing fatal has happened. Nobody knows that better than I do — really. No doubt it's personal vanity with me, as much as anything. And now —"

"Do you know," Charles Garrott spoke up suddenly, as if he did not hear her at all — "I think you're the best I ever knew? The best — the *best* — absolutely the most of a person —"

She, the strong, seemed to start and shrink; she broke in sharply, with instant signs of a shaken poise: "No — *please*! You don't understand me at all. I do — not need sympathy! It's just what I've been trying to say —"

"Well, you are n't getting it from me, no fear. Sympathy! If ever there was honest looking up, if ever —"

"No! — don't! I did n't tell you about it for that! — only to explain why I seemed so . . . It was due you. As I say,

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nobody understands better than I how unreasonable it is — to be so disturbed. And if you had n't come here to-day —"

"Won't you give me credit for some understanding? If you were ten times as disturbed, I'd think it the reasonablest —"

"Yes — for a woman. Well, I'm not that kind of woman," said Mary Wing, with curious agitation, as if she could stand any sort of talk better than this. "Please don't say any more. I don't tell my troubles to be comforted — patted on the head. I'm not feminine, I hope, after all these knocks. You make me —"

"Thank God, *no!*" said the young man on the ladder, considerably moved.

And then that connection which he must have been groping toward for a month flashed startlingly upon him, and he, the authority, blurted out like a boy: —

"No — *you're womanly!*"

He saw his old friend's face quiver a little as the strange word struck her: oddly, it seemed to silence her. But it was not possible that she could be one half so struck with that word as he, Charles Garrott, was. *Mary Wing was a Womanly Woman*. . . . And now she could no more have stopped his speech than she could have stopped a river when the one gate in the dam, long locked, has suddenly burst open.

"That's it. Of course. . . . Funny, I was just thinking over all that as I walked around here — how different those things are. No, not different — they don't belong in the same story at all. What's character got to do with — feathers in the springtime? . . . Born stupid," said Charles, in a low, stirred voice — "that seems to explain me. I'd better have been one-eyed — beat me over the head with it, and still I can't see. . . . Won't see. That's it! — it's worse. I'm just an old-line male — that's what. Just the sort who've taught

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women not to bother to try to be womanly when being feminine comes so much cheaper. Why, look at me, criticizing you in my thoughts, not liking it because you were — independent. What was that but just pique — don't you know? — just common ordinary male jealousy — because a woman did n't need my shoulder to lean on. Manly protector . . . seventeenth-century stuff. Well, you've punished me, don't you worry. . . . Just standing where you always stood, just being your Self. Acting straight from your own law all the time, doing the best sort of things, one after the other — the biggest, the — the *tenderest* —"

"Don't," said the grammar-school teacher again, but in the littlest voice he had ever heard from her lips.

Rapt as he was, that voice penetrated him. More, it alarmed him: and with reason, too. Staring down with a new fixedness, touched with a faint, purely masculine horror, Charles beheld the strangest sight seen by him in many a day. Mary Wing, the unconquerable, had suddenly put her face into her hands.

He had really only been finishing that other talk of theirs, with a certain sense of right; but of course this was n't the time for that. He had been indulging his analytic propensity, his fatal tendency to comment, at her expense. Had n't he understood that she feared nothing so much as his sympathies? . . .

His friend, in her arresting attitude, sat as rigid as a carven woman. The stillness in the little office was profound. Then a voice strained out, very thin, but still not defeated: —

"Don't be alarmed. I'm . . . not going to cry."

And that seemed to settle it. It was as if, in that silent struggle waged all the way from the Flowers' to now, the speaking of the word itself was the fatal admission. The

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school-teacher had no sooner pronounced it than her arms spread suddenly out on the table before her, and her head came down upon them.

Charles Garrott, on his ladder, was heard to take one breath, sharply. After that, no sound came from him. Quite motionless he sat, in the chance position in which the sudden disaster had overtaken him: long arms dangling from his knees, large feet hooked under a ladder-rung, some distance down. He hardly winked an eye.

Mary Wing was crying. That painful hard tension had snapped; the indomitable slim figure drooped beaten, for once. She, also, made little sound in her peculiar difficulty. But her body shook with a stormy racking. And it hurt her, he was sure; hurt her physically, as if she could n't find tears without breaking something inside. . . .

Strange it seemed that once, in this very room, and only the other day really, he had wanted to see Mary cry. He had thought of it then as a desirable sort of symbol, had n't he? — something of that sort. What did her tears have to tell him now? Then he had conceived himself as watching her emotion, moved doubtless, but yet with a secretly gratified masculinity. Now every heave of those slender shoulders was like a clutch upon his heart.

And still there was something in Charles that was not distress at all. He was aware of another and quite different inner sense — peace, the end of struggle, fulfillment — he could not say what it was. It was strange. He was not unhappy. . . .

There came, after a time, signs that his friend was overcoming that hard revolt of feelings too much put upon. Even in the beginning she had never seemed to abandon herself, quite. At length, somewhat unexpectedly, she moved, turned from

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her seat under his eye, and, rising, went away to the office's one window. There she stood, her back toward him. And presently she began to clear her throat, with nervous quick coughings.

Through this, Charles had not spoken, or thought of doing so. To pat Mary's shoulder, this time, had not entered his head. His instinct seemed to feel the banality of any intrusion upon her freedom: she should weep or not weep, just as seemed best to her. Now, as his grave eyes followed her, it occurred to him that his presence here had been, and was, a considerable intrusion. And about the time he had reached this conclusion, Mary spoke, naturally enough, except that a sharp catch of breath broke her sentence in the middle.

"I'm giving you . . . a pleasant visit to-day."

The young man stirred on his perch. He answered, oddly, with a sort of growl: —

"That's right! I'm a fair-weather friend. Keep things pleasant for *me* all the time — or good-bye."

His heroine was sniffing repeatedly, in the humanest way. She kept clearing her throat. Her movements made it clear that she was searching busily for her handkerchief. However, there lay her handkerchief on the table, under his eye. And if she, perhaps, hardly wished to turn and come for it just now, no more did he see his way clear to going and taking it to her.

"No — but what's the sense of it? I'm — doing just what I told Angela not to do. Feeling sorry for myself, that's all."

"Well, I don't feel sorry for you. Don't worry about that."

Charles came down the ladder, and stood a moment kicking at the "New Schools" strewn about the floor.

"Look here, suppose I save time by arranging about this box now? You want it to go to your house, I suppose?"

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"No — I'm going to send it to the grammar-school."

"Oh — all right. I'll attend to it," he said, briefly. "I'll tell the porter to keep it to-night, and get a wagon to-morrow."

On which, without more ado, he stepped from the assistant principal's office, and shut the door behind him.

Charles's conference with the negro porter in the corridor below lasted a minute, perhaps. His diplomatic retirement lasted ten minutes, at least. His surplus time the young man spent in staring out of a tall window into a white-paved courtyard. But that it was a white-paved courtyard, or that it was a courtyard, he never knew. The instant he found that he was staring at it, he jumped a little, and went up-stairs. . . .

If he had meant this interval as a punctuation and the turning of a page, Mary, it seemed, had so accepted it. Reopening Mr. Geddie's door, Charles saw that his absence had been employed for a general setting to rights. The table had been moved back against the wall; the books and globe restored to it, the chair Mary had occupied returned to its place, the window opened to blow out the dust. Mary herself stood in the middle of the room, coated, buttoning her gloves. Without looking at her exactly, he was aware that the white veil which had been caught up around her hat was now let down.

Bygones were bygones, clearly: the least said, the soonest mended. Charles remarked, exactly as if house-cleaning were the sole interest he knew of here: "Well, you've made a good job of it."

And Mary replied, with equal naturalness: "I did what I could. John will have to attend to these things on the floor."

"Yes — I told him to see to that at once."

"He ought to give the closet a good cleaning, too. I'd better tell him — this is just the time."

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"I told him to be sure to scrub the closet. It'll be all right."

Looking up, she said: "You seem to have thought of everything."

"Let me get my hat," said Charles.

But Mary, standing in his way, was regarding him with a sudden directness he had no wish to reciprocate. And she answered his remark about the hat with a little exclamation.

"What's the matter with your eye?"

"My eye?" said the young man, and involuntarily put his hand there. Recollecting, he finished: "Nothing — nothing at all."

The school-teacher came a step nearer, but he went round her as he spoke, and continued his way.

"But there's a good deal the matter with it!" she exclaimed, concerned. "It's swollen — it looks discolored, too. — How did you hurt yourself?"

"Oh, that? Oh!" said Charles, carefully fitting on his hat, and then removing it again. "I remember now — it's nothing. Got a tumble this afternoon, that's all. Stupid thing."

"You must let me get some hot water down the hall. I'm afraid it's —"

But he indicated, quite brusquely, that his eye was all right, just the way he liked it, that having water put on it was, in particular, the last thing he would ever dream of.

She said behind him, slowly, after a pause: "If you won't, you won't, of course. . . . But it's so exactly like you —"

"Ready?" said Charles.

But when he turned he found that Mary had turned, too, after him — stood facing him anew. And this time the confrontation was too near, too immediate, to be further avoided.

He now discovered that the thin veil had not withdrawn his friend very far. Looking at her for the first time since her

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cataclysm, he saw that her delicate face wore that look described as "rain-washed," which commonly means peace, but peace at a price. The redness of her eyelids was quite perceptible. What struck the young man particularly, however, was the look of the blue eyes themselves. More or less irrelevant eyes he had always thought them, for all the heavy arched brows which so emphasized their faculty for steady, sometimes disconcerting, interrogation. That characteristic grave intentness was in Mary's gaze now: but it was not this that gave her look its power to hold Charles Garrott in his tracks.

The peculiar commotion within him gave forth in a short laugh, testy and embarrassed: "Honestly, if you say the word 'eye' to me again —"

"I was n't going to speak of your eye," said Mary Wing, with quite remarkable meekness. . . . "I was thinking of that remark you made — about being a fair-weather friend."

And then she went on hurriedly, with a rare, impulsiveness: "I've just been thinking — I don't suppose since the world began there was ever such another rainy-day friend as you. It's got so now that I never get into trouble without thinking right away — as I was thinking this afternoon when I left the Flowers' — that you'll be right there to help me with it. Yes, I was. And it's so — perfect. Nothing to spoil it ever — not one thing for you to gain — all just your rather extravagant idea of what being a friend means. You don't know — how much it means. . . ."

The strange speech — strange blossom of her disruptive emotion — ended a little short; but that it ended was the principal thing. Doubtless there had been a time when words such as these from Mary Wing, this fine frank expression of abiding friendship, would have been sweet and acceptable to Charles Garrott, crowning him with a full reward.

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But it seemed that that time must have passed, somewhat abruptly. . . .

The two moderns stood, gazing full at each other. And now, in the same moment, a little color tinged the girl's cheek, beneath her veil, and the young man turned rather pale.

"Miss Mary, you must be dreaming," said Charles, gently. "I've never done anything for you in my life. We both know that. Let's go."

Mary, her eyes falling, had resumed the buttoning of her gloves. She moved toward the door. The descent of the High School stairs was made in comparative silence. The chief item of importance developed was that Mary intended to go home by street-car; she was tired, she mentioned. It seemed that Charles, on the contrary, had no intention of foregoing his afternoon constitutional. He said that he would see Miss Mary to her car, however; and he did.

So the old friends parted casually on a street corner, as they had done a hundred times before.

But in the Studio, there could be no such reserve, no such slurring of the characteristic services of men. Here combat must have its fair due, in the moral order of a too sedentary world. Judge Blenso, in brief, from whom no secrets were hid, had the full facts relative to the altered eye within ten minutes of Charles's homecoming, an hour later; and the Judge's cold manner, already somewhat softened by the heartening acceptance of Entry 3, straightway dissolved in exultation and proud joy. The reconciliation between uncle and nephew was instantaneous and immutable, and there followed, by consequence, the most broken, the most conversational, evening in the history of the Studio.

Charles was very glad to be reconciled with his relative. He was very glad to feel that his secretary no longer viewed him

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with bald disgust. Nevertheless, there were times, necessarily, when a writer wished that he had no relative and secretary at all; and this, in a word, was one of them. Charles did not wish, to-night, to go over and over one set of primitive facts indefinitely; he did not wish to listen to sporting anecdote and reminiscence, hour after hour; in chief, he did not wish to go to bed at half-past ten o'clock. However, he did each and all of these things, perforce.

"Always retire early after a fight! — that was my father's rule, long as he lived!" cried Uncle George, his black eyes dangerously bright. . . . "No — let's see. *Before* a fight — that was father's way! Well, good gad! — too late for that now! You come along to bed, my dear fellow! . . ."

But, in time, a sweet snoring from the parallel white couch indicated freedom, welcome solitude, at last. And then the young man rose noiselessly in the dark, and slipped back to the familiar Studio, where all his personal life had so long had its heart and center. On the old writing-table, in front of which he had sat and pondered so many hours, so many nights, the green-domed lamp was set burning anew. However, Charles did not sit at his table now. Beside the lamp, Big Bill without surcease ticked off the flying minutes of a writer's prized leisure. But Charles heeded not Big Bill. Wrapped in a bathrobe grown too short for his long shanks, he paced his carpet on slippered feet, up and down; and there was no such thing as bedtime now. For this day the authority had made the last and the best of all his many discoveries about Woman: and he did not see how he could ever sleep again.

XXIV

LUEMMA, the twelve-dollar cook, had never dreamed of having opera-glasses of her own; hence she looked pleased, for once in her life, when her departing young mistress unexpectedly presented her with a pair: old and somewhat shabby, doubtless, but still possessing the valuable power of bringing distant objects near. And it must be assumed that the nice man who sold the gasoline was equally glad to have the Fordette for his own: else he would probably not have fattened up the trousseau, one day, by purchasing the interesting little vehicle (cheap) for cash.

Because of mourning in the bride's family, the Flower-Manford nuptials would be "very quiet." Invitations were strictly limited to near relatives of the contracting parties, with a very few of the most intimate friends. So the social columns of the "Post" had warned and notified all persons in due season. However, Charles Garrott, reading, was not cast down. As the groom's chosen supporter in his "most need," Charles had had his fixed place from the beginning. Further, he considered himself fully entitled to be present in the category of intimate friends, not to mention his peculiar relation as one who had narrowly escaped a yet closer privilege in the premises.

Angela's was an afternoon wedding: the hour of "taking place," five o'clock. At four o'clock on the set day, Charles prematurely snapped his tutorial watch at Miss Grace (who was still waiting), and rushed away to his rooms. At half-past four, after scenes of wild haste, he stood out in the Studio,

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for final inspection. He was arrayed in what the Britons like to call a "morning coat": a morning coat new-pressed by Judge Blenso's skillful hand and patent iron, made glorious by Judge Blenso's best new waistcoat, especially urged for the occasion. Now the admiring secretary pinned a white carnation in the morning-coat lapel, as excited over it all, oddly enough, as if the wedding afoot were his young employer's own. So dismissed with a blessing, Charles jumped into a taxicab, at four thirty-five precisely, and shot away to the Bellingham. Here, in a bedroom upstairs, a brief delay occurred, owing to the appearance and behavior of the bridegroom. The face that Donald, in his regalia, turned upon his best man, bursting in, was seen to be a pale green in color; his voice and speech were highly erratic, his attempt at a brave smile a sight to rend one's heart. On this pitiful funk, Charles's gibes, his appeals to the higher nature, had but small effect. "Here's the ring," said the groom, with a sick croak. "Charlie, had n't I better take one little drink?"

However, the cab was swift. The drive to Center Street was but a matter of five minutes. Once more the two young men were stepping, side by side, up the worn brick walkway. It made Charles think of the day they had come to return the books. But this time the line of vehicles before the weather-beaten door was conclusive testimony to the triumphant activity within.

In the hall, a lady greeted them, a near relative doubtless. A dim pleased significant hush seemed to emanate from the lady, and pervade the house. From behind the dark curtains of the parlor, there proceeded the murmur of assembled persons, waiting. Even the hatstand, though essentially unchanged, somehow conveyed a mysterious expectancy.

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They were sent aloft to an upper chamber, conceived to be Wallie's. Here they were instructed to wait quietly till somebody had need of them.

The waiting was rather trying. Tête-à-tête in the small bare room, groom and attendant talked but fitfully. Donald seemed to have drawn little courage from his dram. He sat stiffly on a chair-edge, jumping at each peal of the loud little bell below. Much more unreasonably, the best man showed signs of nervousness, too: it was observed that he had cut himself twice while shaving. And suddenly, jerking out his watch, he announced that probably he had better step out for a minute — reconnoiter — see what he could see.

"They ought to want you now, seems to me," quoth he. "I'll see. You sit tight, right there."

"Awright," croaked Donald.

So Charles stepped out from the nuptial waiting-room, and closed the door behind him. Having done this, he came to a standstill, abruptly: for here, in the Flowers' still upstairs hall, he beheld just the sight he had gone forth to seek.

At the other end of the hall, in the dimness, stood the bride's attendant, Cousin Mary Wing. She, too, had just come out of a door, it seemed; she, too, had stopped and was gazing. And the first look of the blue eyes, over the space, released in him, the old helper with his secret help, a vast content; just touched with a subtle sadness that such a little gain could mean so much to her now.

He moved toward her in the expectant quiet. . . .

Doubtless, it was no small thing that Mr. Mysinger had kept, more or less, that promise he had made under threat and duress; marvel enough that he had, in fact, "personally requested" Mr. Senff to "see what could be done," etc., as agreed. Surely the whole matter had been fuller of openings for

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double-dealing than an egg was of meat. And yet, to Charles, the upshot of all the hoping and planning had been a cruel disappointment. For Life, alas, still differs from Romance, realities still refuse to fade like a dream, at just the suitable moment. In brief, the School Board, by a majority of one, had yesterday ruled that Mary should have her reappointment to the High School staff, "as soon as arrangements would permit"; but of the assistant principal's office no word was said.

To one who had voluntarily surrendered her great promotion, this seemed but a scanty recompense. And as for the new plan, his and Hazen's, concerning the Assistant Superintendency of Schools next year — no less — ("There's really a good chance, now that the Mysinger bunch are showing a better spirit," said Hazen) — that was much too remote to seem very substantial just now. . . .

In the dark upstairs hall, the friends greeted briefly, in voices scarcely above a whisper. Mary said hurriedly: "Donald's here? Angela'll be ready to see him in just a second."

"I'll produce him — dead or alive."

The best man laid his hand on the banister. But his subconsciousness warned him that the banisters were dusty, and he took his hand away.

"You look happy to-day."

"Yes — should n't I be? Were n't you — pleased, when you read —"

"They've treated you abominably — no other way to express it."

She smiled at him, but looked away. And he perceived, or thought he did, that the memory of their last meeting remained with her, touching her manner with a faint self-consciousness.

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"You are hard to satisfy," she said. "I've felt like singing all day. . . . Will you tell Donald to come now?"

"Yes. I'm going to see you after this is over?"

But no, she, the busy, was to stay here for the night, it seemed, keeping Mrs. Flower company in her daughterlessness. And Charles, having anticipated this occasion principally as her holiday-time and his own, turned away with the sense that most of the wedding was over. . . .

Yet this, of course, was but the side-play of elders, counting for nothing. Now the prime action of the day, the culminating hour, was at hand.

Donald was whisked away for a brief glimpse at his love. Returning, he confronted almost immediately the moment of his public appearance and confession. Word came to Wallie's room that the gentlemen were to descend forthwith, for better or worse. "Now then!" whispered Charles, as they started down — "chest out, chin up!" And Donald grinned back feebly, as if to prove to himself that he still could. Now the dim hush deepened and thickened, the little house seemed to hold its breath. There was no music to cover these preliminaries, because of the mourning. In complete stillness, groom and escort stepped through the curtains into the assembled company, which, though limited in numbers as it was, seemed to fill the little car-shaped parlor. Through a narrow lane between vaguely discerned relatives and friends, the young men moved to their appointed place. Here they stood, almost stepping on a stout clergyman, undergoing his frank, interested scrutiny, through a dreadful pause. Then at last a stir in the company made it clear that the bride was at hand; and after that Donald could feel that nobody was paying any attention to him.

So without great pomp or ritual, fuss or feathers, came

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the great moment to which all one woman's life had looked forward, to which, conceivably, it might all look back. Standing statue-like a few feet from her, the fingers of one hand feeling in Judge Blenso's waistcoat-pocket for the ring, those of the other resting lightly on the cold Latrobe, Charles listened to the beautiful words which converted Angela Flower into Mrs. Donald Manford.

Angela "was married in a traveling-suit." She was a little pale, like her lord and master; her responses were just audible. And never had Charles seen her look so maidenly sweet, so feminine and engaging and desirable. Her soft and pretty face, yet unbroken by a line, was immensely serious. Her look into the beyond was faintly wistful, a little awed, supremely innocent. A wonder dawned in the great dark eyes. Here girlhood ended: in great happiness, doubtless, yet in great mysteries too. Here came change, so colossal that no man could ever know change in these terms. Where led this unknown parting of the ways, what was the heart and meaning of Life?

And Mary Wing's face, glimpsed once or twice over the bride's shoulder, was surprised wearing much the same look too. No woman, perhaps, even a fighting educator, listens quite unmoved to these old words. Sweetly pensive, Mary gazed at her so different cousin. And Charles wondered if she had got quite philosophical now, and wished that she had something much bigger to feel like singing about to-day. . . .

"I pronounce you *mon* and wife," cried the parson: and it was not the first thing he had pronounced loudly, either.

So came relaxation from the solemn stiffness. There was a flutter of movement, human speech again, the swift embrace of bride and bride's mother. Then speech became free and general, and the near relatives rushed upon the happy pair.

Charles, having wrung Donald's hand in the approved

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manner, had his due turn before the center of the visible world. It was the first time he had seen Angela, to speak to, since the day of the party-call. But, though she was naturally a little nervous and staccato in the circumstances, he considered that she received his felicitations with dignity and graciousness.

"Donald and I appreciated your gift so much. I hope you got my note? It was perfectly lovely. We shall think of you whenever we use it."

Interesting, indeed, it was to Charles to see these pretty eyes, that he had once caused to weep, resting upon him with this genuine bright restless indifference.

"When you're in New York, you must be sure to let us know. Donald and I will always be so glad to see you. I hope we'll have a guest-room, and then you must come to stay with us. I do hope you will have better luck with your stories, Mr. Garrott. I'll be watching for you in the magazines — remember! How do you do, Cousin Annie? Donald and I appreciated your gift *so* much . . ."

So Charles Garrott passed on, a bachelor still, still thinking about his "story." . . .

In the "small reception following" — to quote the "Post" again — Charles did what he could to make the affair a success, circulating about like a valued member of the family, speaking winningly to old ladies whom he did not know, heartening the timid with cake and wine. His own best moments in the reception were short talks with two Flowers, brothers of the bride. But Wallie, the chemist and lamp-repairer, — so it was now written on the stars, — was down for his Easter vacation only: he was returning to college next week. "The Wings want mother to visit them, till I come back in June," he let fall, with truly masculine unconsciousness; and felt no irony in his sister's impending departure to

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lead her own life, while Mary Wing, staying at home, took care of her mother.

As for the older brother, the wealthy and generous Tommy, it seemed that he had run on all the way from Pittsburg for the express purpose of "giving Angela away." A handsome volatile little chap, Tommy proved to be, with a mustache, a manner, and a worried look in the corners of his eyes: and Charles, introduced, examined him with unaffected interest. For Charles had often thought of Tommy, often wondered if Tommy might not be, at heart, a master humorist. Unluckily, that interesting point was never settled, the acquaintance being cut short untimely by the general movement toward the hall.

The embarkation of Mr. and Mrs. Manford was "very quiet." There was no hurling of old slippers, no unseemly merriment. They came down the narrow stairs amid a little rice, a last subdued chorus of farewells. The bride's pallor was noticed now, her pretty smile was a little fixed. The groom, on the contrary, affected the hearty, the jovial: his manly backbone was obviously reasserting itself, now that he was a lawful protector henceforward. It was observed on all sides that they made a good-looking and well-matched couple.

So Angela and Donald went out on their great adventure. And Charles went with them down the walkway, with a bag or two to carry, doing his duty as he saw it, to the end. With his own hands he clicked shut the door of their wedding-coach. (A liveried one it was, the symbolic vehicle not being available, for reasons explained.) "We'll hope to see you soon, in our own Home," said Angela, the Home-Maker, the very last thing. And then the coach leapt away, and he, the old principal friend, stood motionless, bareheaded in the mild sunshine, staring after it. . . .

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Stepping up on the verandah again, Charles encountered the relative who had welcomed him on arrival — Mrs. Flinchman, Finchman, did she say? — and who now welcomed him anew, beaming.

“Well, Mr. Garrott! — your friend is a fortunate young man, is he not? I don’t think I ever knew a sweeter, truer, more womanly girl. And you,” she queried, with immense archness, “knew her so very well, too, I believe?”

He intimated pleasantly that few, indeed, had known her better, perhaps: whereon the lady’s expression grew more significant than ever.

“Well, no wonder the men were all flocking about her, I’m sure — a lovely, old-time young woman! But I understand it was love at first sight with these two — they simply *flew* together! Ah,” said Mrs. Finchman (Flinchman?) with a sigh, which, however, did not disturb the deeply gratified look indigenous to women at weddings — “ah, it’s very sweet! A real old-fashioned romance, that’s what I call it, Mr. Garrott! And now that we’ve come to the end of the story, who can doubt that they’ll live happy ever after — as you literary men are so fond of putting it?”

“Who, indeed, madam? It — all went off very smoothly, I thought? Well! —”

“You must be going? Then *good-bye*! — so sorry it’s over! Knowing of you so well as dear Angela’s faithful friend, Mr. Garrott, I feel that we are anything but strangers, and hope so much you will find time to come in and see us, one evening very soon. We live quietly on Mason Street, next to the Methodist Church — I and my sweet girl Jennie.”

He left the house, after all, with Mary Wing, who was going home for an hour’s work on school examination-books, be-

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fore returning to sup with Mrs. Flower. This decision she had casually communicated, by the hatstand just now. So the "holiday-time" came to a six-blocks' walk: and even that was an after-thought. Truly, if a man had a mind to see this woman, without definite transactions to discuss, he had need of all his delicacy and tact. Calls, drives, bridge-parties, going to places, doing things: she had no room in her life for such as these. Time was more precious to Mary than to a writer. And she had convinced one writer, at least, by a moving tribute to his perfect friendship, that she had never had a personal thought of him in her life.

But Charles did not despair. He was a young man still. And meantime he was happy.

"You should wear a hat like that every day," she said, agreeably, as they turned into Washington Street. "You look seven feet tall at least. . . . By the way, did you feel your ears burning, about one o'clock to-day?"

He said no, and smiled a little. Her intention of keeping the conversation away from certain topics — topics that might have been uppermost in both their minds to-day, perhaps — had been perfectly evident to him from the moment they crossed the verandah.

"I met Judge Blenso as I came home to lunch," continued Mary, "and he stopped for a talk — purely to tell me what a wonderful person you were, it seemed. But in that connection, he gave me some exciting news — that you've just had a very flattering offer for 'Bondwomen' — and refused it! I could n't understand why."

At that, he looked subtly pleased, while affecting but a modest amusement. The event in question had been, in truth, sweet balm to the spirit and the confidence bruised in so many rebuffs. Still, his reply was only that his relative was born for

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a press-agent clearly. Requested to explain this dark saying, he gave a light disparaging account of his only offer, stating that Appleholt Brothers, before accepting his book, had desired him to rewrite it throughout, completely revolutionizing the character of his heroine and omitting not less than fifty thousand words, including the existing plot.

Mary glanced up at him. "I'm taking this with a little salt — shall I?"

The author laughed. "Well, it was about like that. Still," he added, as if there were such a thing as carrying modesty too far, — "of course I could do what they want easily enough — in a month, I think."

"You don't seem excited at all. But you are n't going to do it?"

"On the contrary, I have now formally changed the name of my old novel to 'Bandwomen,' and — put it in the Morgue."

"The Morgue?"

"A repository for deceased manuscripts, recently founded by my relative."

"Oh!" said she, slowly. And, after a pause: "You don't feel any longer that it's good?"

"I *do* feel that it's good! I'd swear it — before a publishers' convention. But — it does n't happen to be the story I want to write any more. I'm not interested in it."

There was another pause.

"It does n't represent you now, I suppose? And the one you do want to write? — you're writing it, are n't you? Judge Blenso says you work till all hours of the night — and this is going to be your masterpiece."

"I shall have to caution the Judge about this, I see. We won't have a friend left, between us."

"But I'm interested, very much so. I've wondered . . .

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Do you remember your speech at the Redmantle Club last winter — on work for women? Do you think you'd make the same speech to-day?"

"Oh," he said, lightly, "I don't know quite so much as I did last winter, you see. I'm not in the class with the lady in Sweden any more. . . . Why do you suspect my — loyalty?"

"Suspect? — no. I was only deducing from what you just said. I know something about the point of view you took in 'Bondwomen' — you told me once — and now if you're so dissatisfied with it that —"

"No! — no! It is n't that! My point of view has n't changed at all. It's only —"

He glanced down at her, and away, suddenly struck with hidden significances, abruptly recalling that this woman beside him had played hardly less part in the making of "Bondwomen" than in "Bondwomen's" final consignment to the Morgue. . . .

"I — I want to approach the whole question differently — lay a different emphasis — that's all. . . . But if I believed in the value of work last year, as — as a liberal education in responsibility — I believe in it ten times as much now. Don't you know that?"

"I'm glad you feel so. And that's what you're going to say in this book?"

"Hardly anything else."

They walked on a little way in silence. The afternoon was fine; the last flickers of a vernal sun danced along the side-walks. Many people moved on the promenade. The passing moderns attracted the favorable gaze of not a few acquaintances. In appearance, Mary was judged one of the variable women. She, the worker, with her habitually colorless face and faintly fragile look, responded remarkably to dress, as

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Charles had once before had occasion to note. And to-day, she was dressed as for a holiday and a fête. However, he hardly looked at her once, throughout the brief walk.

"Do you know," she said suddenly, again with some touch of consciousness, he thought, — "every conversation you and I have had for months has been about *me*? That came over me, with a sort of shock — the other day. I feel that there's a great arrears to make up. And I doubt if you know how much I've wanted to hear about this book — since you told me you had your 'line' straight at last. See how I remember. . . . Don't you mean to give me any idea what the story's to be about?"

The young man's heart seemed to move a little within him.

"Can you imagine a writer's turning away from an opening like that?"

"Well — but when will you?"

"It's a long story. I don't think I could make it all clear in five or seven minutes — and that's all the time you have to spare nowadays."

"Do I seem as bad as that? . . . But I know literally nothing about it yet, you see, except what I've just extracted. Idleness is bad for able-bodied persons, including women. Does that state your point of view — approximately?"

"Precisely."

"And how are you developing it this time? I mean — with a working-woman as your central figure?"

"No — principally with a woman who has nothing to do — and reacts accordingly."

"Oh! . . . That's what you mean by a difference of approach, I suppose? She's married?"

"No — that's the trouble."

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"You are dreadfully mysterious. How *does* she react?"

"Of course, she marries."

"Then it's not a story of work at all?"

"Hardly at all. It's an old-fashioned romance."

"I see — told from a new-fashioned point of view?"

Charles laughed. "The description was suggested to me — very recently. Up to a point, it fits. You see, I'm still learning."

"You know," said Mary, after a step or two, "you like to picture yourself as one who can't be restrained from talking about himself and his work, on the smallest provocation. In reality . . . Tell me honestly, do you object to being cross-examined this way?"

His gaze kept straight ahead.

"By you? — oh, no. Of course, I . . . I've wanted to tell you my story some day."

"Then I'll continue my quiz now. I know it's usually a stupid question to ask — but have you decided on a title yet?"

But that happened to be the one thing he did not care to tell her now.

"You can't fix the title till you're done, you know," he evaded lightly. "A story changes so. But I have a sub-title in mind . . ."

She asked if his sub-title was a secret, and he said no.

"I'd thought of — 'A Comedy of Temporary Spinsters' — something like that," said the author, and, unseen, colored abruptly.

"That's *good*!" Mary exclaimed after a moment. "It suggests — so much! Temporary Spinsters. . . . Only — I hope you don't mean to be cruel to your heroine?"

"Oh, no."

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They turned into Olive Street.

"And by the way," said Charles, "she's not my heroine — only my central figure."

"Oh! Is there a distinction? Then will there be two women in this book?"

"Of course — a common principle of writing. Your central figure — in a character story — needs the comment of contrast, you know — of a — a foil."

"I had n't thought of that. You had only one woman in 'Bondwomen,' you see. . . . And the contrast — she'll be as different as possible — a working-woman, I suppose? — a Permanent Spinster! That's interesting, I think — a study in contrasting types. Now — by my catechism — I really begin to get an idea —"

"Do you? I don't know. There are points — there are points — which I've never been able to settle yet, myself."

Mary began to search for her latch-key. Splendidly competent though she was, she did not appear to have a regular place for keeping her key, like a man. And Charles wondered if she had quite forgotten that offhand remark of his, the day of his luncheon to Helen Carson, that he was drawing his Line from his life. . . .

"But the men in the story," she was saying — rather mechanically, he thought — "I conclude there must be some, even though you don't mention them. What type do you make your hero?"

"Oh! — hero! There is n't any. The hero's the reader."

"The reader! — I fear that's too technical for me."

He explained: "My — my study develops by the method of 'progressive revelation,' so-called — the principal characters being first set out, of course, with the wrong labels carefully

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pinned on them. Well, the hero's just the commentator on this development as it takes place, thinking it out to save the reader the trouble."

"But — is n't it the theory nowadays that there should n't be any commentator?"

"Oh, there may be a *theory*!" he retorted, the artist briefly flashing in the man. "However, *I* comment."

They went up the Wings' three steps, and Mary put her key into the lock.

"But your hero can't be altogether an abstraction," she insisted, thus engaged — "else how can there be any old-fashioned romance?"

The young man's laugh covered an interest in the conversation intense to the point of physical pain.

"Really, this won't do. We get it more and more backwards. I have n't even described the story to you right. It's not an old-fashioned anything — primarily — it's not a study of types. No, it's — it's an intellectual autobiography. Do you work on Sundays?"

The school-teacher wheeled in her open but inhospitable door, with something like reproach in her eyes, and said: "*No*!"

"Then you can't escape me. I'll stay in town this Sunday, and you shall hear it all from the beginning. You — you've brought it on yourself now."

The two moderns looked at each other. And the young man in the tall hat was breathing rather hard.

"But — would n't that disappoint your mother? I know — I've noticed — that you never let anything interfere . . ."

His look changed perceptibly at that. And still, it was not the son, not the old critic of Egoettes, who answered, slightly chagrined: —

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"What time have you to give me, then? Some day in the summer vacation?"

Mary Wing's eyes fell to her hand on the door-knob. "I hoped," she said, "that you would come in now."

"But your — your work?"

"I — thought I would take a holiday to-day."

So they went into the house. And Charles stood alone in the Wings' silent hall, slowly pulling off his wedding-gloves.

In the sitting-room Mary was similarly occupied. Though she was going back to the Flowers' so soon, she took off her hat. Having done so, she stood before the mantel-mirror, fluffing up her hair a little, where the hat had pressed it down. It is the immemorial fashion of women: a characteristic position, and so an engaging one. Delicately the upraised arms defined the lines of a graceful figure.

But when Mary saw in the mirror that Charles Garrott had come into the room, and had stopped short just over the threshold, looking at her, she knew only that the moment had come when she must make acknowledgments due for good aid and comfort received. And in her, the strong, nervousness spread now like a fear.

So she plunged hastily, the moment their eyes met: "I know, of course, there is n't time to tell me about it now. But — I don't seem to get any picture of your — your man at all. . . . What sort of man is he, personally?"

The author, starting a little, moved forward in the dusky room.

"Oh, let's not speak of him," he said, with visible effort. "He's only a writer. That's polite for a poor stick."

"No — don't! Tell me — in the action of the story — what does he do?"

"Not a thing — really. Just sits around and thinks."

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Strength came into her low voice: "Why — *why* do you always belittle him so?"

Continuing to look at her, he said, remotely surprised: "Belittle him? But I don't."

The school-teacher's fingers closed over the mantel, and the tips of her nails whitened.

"Then I don't understand at all," she said, steadily. "I've been thinking that it was he who almost murdered the villain, and gave one of the Spinsters her old place back. . . ."

Charles Garrott stood like a man turned to stone, fascinated gaze upon the eyes in the mirror: girlish eyes, doubtless, but quite unwavering now. And then, in an instant, his face was scarlet from neck to brow. His embarrassment was frightful to see: that of a soul too suddenly stripped bare.

"Oh! . . . So you've been looking through me — all along. I see . . . the Judge did n't confine himself to . . . Well, his knowing — was purely an accident. He had, of course, no —"

"And why must my knowing be an accident, too?"

"I — it was simply something you had nothing whatever to do with. And there was an understanding — the — the matter was entirely private. You'll please forget the Judge's — small-talk, and —"

"Not if I live to be a thousand! I'll forget everything — I'll forget my name! — but that! — no, you ask too much of my feelings."

That, indeed, checked the young man's horrible self-consciousness. He saw, with unsteady bewilderment, that this was no light conversation of hers, that Mary Wing was more deeply moved than he had ever seen her. And suddenly he was aware, by some swift flicker of his intuition, that it was to say this to him, and nothing else, that she had come home, made a holiday, to-day. . . .

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"And you told me you had done nothing for me," she said, in the same passionate low voice — "that day — when you had just done everything — what nobody else in the wide world would ever have done for me! And you were — hurt, too . . ."

She stopped, abruptly. Her face quivered, just perceptibly, but he saw it. Strange and incalculable. . . . Surely he had tried to do bigger and better things for Mary, than the impromptu display of his primitive passion. . . . Was this, also, of the primal and everlasting; did this, too, touch the immutable and true?

The helper was making reply, not exactly with *insouciance*: "Why! — why, but I can't let you think of it — it was *nothing*! I *enjoyed* it! I simply did n't think he had behaved to you as he should. Naturally, I did n't like that . . ."

"*You* did n't — because that's the way you are. You expect nothing — but give everything. I don't like to hear you make light of yourself. I don't."

She turned away, went over to her desk by the window, where the school examination-books awaited her. But once more it was clear that she had no purpose here. She moved the piled books on the desk-leaf, half an inch, perhaps, and went on in a controlled voice: —

"But I can't tell you how I felt, and feel, about it. And it's foolish to — try to say thank you. We must talk of something else. . . . Sit down, won't you? I'll give you some light in a minute."

But the young man in the wedding raiment did not sit down, gave no sign at all that he had heard her conclusive and hortatory speech. His eyes, turning, had followed her as she went away from him. And now, as she ended, he only stood and looked; looked over the familiar room at the slender figure

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of a woman which, all so suddenly, had shot up to fill the world for him.

Fading light from the Green Park just touched Mary's face, where she stood. She was a school-teacher, thirty years old. Life had buffeted her: hard contacts with the real world had left upon her their permanent marks, traced lines not to be eradicated beside these fine eyes. This woman's first youth, her April bloom, was gone forever. But to this man on the hearthside, her presence, her nearness, were charged now with an intense power over depths in him which would stir to no fleshly prettiness.

He had her secret now. He knew her, a Woman revealed. And, standing and looking at her over the darkening room, he was mysteriously shaken with a profound emotion.

This was his best old friend, this was the being he admired most upon earth. She was his dearest comrade, his work-fellow and his playmate, his human free and equal. She had a mind as good as his, a spirit whose integrity he respected no less than his own; hands that were capable and feet that she stood upon, and did not depend. She had an honor that was not woman's honor, a virtue and character that had no part with the business of sex. There was no competence a man had that this woman did not have: she was as versatile and thoughtful and fearless and free as the best of them. And, through and beyond all this, there was the discovered marvel, that she had tilled and kept sweet the garden of her womanhood. Underlying her rich human worthiness, as the mothering earth lies under a tree, there was the treasure he had hardly glimpsed, this store of her secret tenderness.

So it was that Charles Garrott spoke up suddenly, with a kind of huskiness:—

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"No, there's only one thing to talk of now. You will have to hear my story."

The grammar-school teacher did not move. The twilight sitting-room was stiller than a church. The young man went toward her on feet not now to be stopped.

"But not from the beginning — no. That does n't matter. It's the ending — I have waited to talk with you about."

He stood now by the hard-worked little desk, an elbow rested on the top; he looked down at the bent familiar head, the thick crown of feminine fair hair. Just so, he had stood and looked on that other day, when she had written upon his heart what freedom meant to her.

"I wanted to show how one man — got his education in womanhood — learned how strength is stronger for being sweet — just by coming to see and understand the moral beauty of one woman's life. . . . That is my story. But it is n't enough to end with."

Some of his dignity, some of his self-control, seemed abruptly to forsake the hard-pressed young man.

"You are that woman," he said, hoarsely. "You've educated me. But it is n't enough."

She, his only heroine, raised her head, gave him one look from under her arched brows; a strange look, that might have said good-bye to the perfect friendship he had forever changed now. And he saw in the dusk that her face was very pale.

"You've supposed I want nothing for myself. I am here asking for everything . . ."

Her lashes fell. He was so close to her now that, just by putting out his arm a little, he could have taken one of the small hands on the desk-leaf. So he did put out his arm thus. Her hand, possessed, was cold as ice; but it was not

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withdrawn. No, Mary's hand seemed to stay and cling, like a hand come Home.

And now he heard her voice, as tender as a mother's: —

“Ah, have I anything to give, do you think — that has n't been given? What sort of ending do you want?”

So Charles told her then what sort of ending he wanted. And that, and no other, was the sort of ending he had.

THE END

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